

***LIFE IN THE AFTERMATH OF A
NARCISSIST***

***By Becky (Ruff) Reed
2nd Edition 2012***

***Sequel to “Romance Stew – the Way to a Woman's
Heart”***

***The Meek Must Be Careful Not
to Inherit the Dirt...
(Ruth Joyce, my mom)***

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No Longer Walking on Eggshells...

*To all the women I've met who
share this experience
with me...*

Amazing ladies – each and every one...

*“No one can change the path that you must go.
The time will come around when you know that it’s
yours. Maybe there’s a chance to go back ... home ...
now that I have some directions.”*

— “The Wiz”

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"There are no accidents... there is only some purpose that we haven't yet understood."

~Deepak Chopra

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**Acknowledgments to
All the Grand
Participants in This
Lifetime...**

**And in the study of
Narcissism
and
Psychopathy...**

Chapter I

The Lone Caustic Comedian

" Relationships are like glass. Sometimes it's better to leave them broken than try to hurt yourself putting it back together."

~Anonymous

What has been the greatest observation of myself as I look at my life with a narcissistic spouse and the bizarre hodgepodge of his family players who contributed to the warped dimension into which I had fallen? A dream I recently had comes to mind:

Sitting in the witness box next to the judge in a courtroom,
the prosecutor poses two questions:

(1) Right after your spouse left you high and dry,
following the evaporation of all your funds,
hopes and dreams about the marriage,
and so easily moved on with another
woman....

***Would you – given a change of heart on his part -
have tried one more time to make it work? Yes, I***

knew the Hell

**(and thought I could make a
difference for all....)**

AND

(2) Would you now?

No, I *knew* the Hell

**(and recognized there would
be no difference for all...)**

This time of my life had been a trek through the bowels of the
Twilight Zone. With all of the ups and downs of life, why

had this particular journey been so devastatingly painful?

I believe the answer to be “betrayal.” That is the seduction of a being using treachery. For me, it entailed taking the goodness within me – my choices, actions, and decisions to see the good in others – and twisting it, changing the “me” I had come to believe was stable and honorable. Turning my world upside down, I did indeed feel like Alice falling through the looking glass. My thoughts that I had grown and matured kept me on the path to what I believed was my ability to create the life I desired. However, agreements from others were necessary and that, as is said, was the rub.

Integrating feelings and choices in my life to that point, I felt there to be a purpose for connecting with others. My sense of closeness to my idea of God and the Universe was strong and I not only sought, but eagerly awaited my older, feet-on-the-ground Prince Charming. When my spouse-to-be entered my scope of awareness, I felt seen and acknowledged. It was a heady kind of high. The show only gathered momentum when I met his invalid mother and her ailing spouse.

If emotions open a monolog with the soul, mine stood as a cryptically caustic comedian onstage. My heart so blatantly expressed its desire for that illusory and somehow unattainable entity of true love. Thinking, aha! this is it. And just because it comes with some obstacles doesn't make this path any less alluring or sweet...*I belong...I am appreciated...I am needed for the unique attributes I bring along.* At this point in my life, I resemble a dark haired version of “Aunt Bea of The Andy Griffith Show” and finding a man who appeared calm, bright, communicative, AND had an excellent job seemed like Christmas!

However, coming into this particular production of “valued

family and love” was like joining a circus... on a foreign planet. Or awaking from a coma to discover all that you held true for dealing with other people was amiss somehow. I remember episodes of science fiction shows where a person discovers one day that they no longer know the language, the rudimentary levels of letters and vocabulary.

Knowing my spouse from many emails, phone conversations, and dating, I found him delightful. He was bright, articulate, cultured and able to stand his ground with new people. I was totally enjoying him caring for me and my small extended family. This was a man among men – fully versed in the hi-tech arena with an impressive job. He held a deep respect for his elderly parents and his children, brothers, and extended clan. When we met, he was staying with his parents – returning to the state after many years of working on-the-road for companies and traveling continuously. The house he was buying had most of the paperwork processed. And he not only loved me, he liked me. We had many exciting conversations about relationships, people, places, and shared hopes and dreams of tomorrows.

I came to the marriage with high hopes of optimistic expectation. **RomanceStew**, my first book tells of my game plan to find romance through my adult life. Passion for the ideal of sharing love and realities marked me as a happy-thinker, willing to take risks for life and love. I was a babe-in-the-woods regarding narcissism and psychopathy. Although there was much horrific anguish in this learning process, I am finally – almost two years out of the ordeal, finding me again, and my sense of humor with indomitable spirit. My desire is to share this journey of sensations. God Bless each and everyone of you who find yourselves also on this strange path of confusion and other-worldly equations.

Let me introduce you to some amazing authors who work to explain this land of smoke and mirrors.

Robert O'Connor, an amazing therapist, and Peter Shepherd of www.trans4mind.com.

Betty LaLuna – (Facebook Blog – Narc Raider) your wheelbarrow-full of people and communication skills show you as a shining beacon of awareness and One of a Kind.

SAM VAKNIN whose work, **MalignantSelf-Love:Narcissism Revisited**, is the very cornerstone to understanding the narcissist and how he thinks, what his modus operandi is, how the patterns affect victims, what the confusion looks like, and the prognosis for both narcissist and survivor.

Thomas Sheridan for his **Puzzling People: The Labyrinth of the Psychopath**. Focusing on romantic relationships, Sheridan deals with the underbelly of psychopathy and explains the mental workings from the point of view of one who has a first hand account.

WomenWhoLovePsychopaths **Brown**

by Sandra L.

(MA)

I was asked what kind of women attract the narcissist (and psychopath) - I just finished reading Sandra L. Brown, M.A.'s Women Who Love Psychopaths. This is an AMAZINGLY encompassing work and I'd say that coming through a relationship of inevitable harm, I found it relief-exploding in the evaluation of women who suffer from such contact. I said repeatedly that I felt my goodness was turned against me...and she categorizes just what and why this occurs....and "codependency" isn't in the mix. Women connected to the strange sycophant actually began the relationship "while impaired" - past periods of extended care-giving, loss such as divorce...even boredom. This is a unique study of the "victims" of psychopaths and their assets such as relationship investment. So many of the traits have been misdiagnosed as attachment formats. This illustrates the predictable cycle of these relationships and why

the bonding is so strong - how the woman, normally strong and vital, feels so fragile or mentally ill. Dissonance from the victim's perspective has a great deal to do with the psychopath's dichotomy of his childlike quality and adult mystique, not to mention communication skills and techniques.

The entire book is compiled with data, explanation, reason, and connectivity. There is no fluff within the covers.

The reasons we find ourselves captivated by these "alien essences" can be brought to light and Sandra Brown does this with clarity and an empathic comprehension - especially within the awareness of women because it is embarrassing being caught in the lure of sexuality. We are intelligent...and capable...and yet, we succumbed to some fairy tale -explained are the release of hormones and the staging by the psychopath, even the differentiation in his use of language.

We who have been taught that communication is the tool for problem solving find ourselves in the Twilight Zone. In so many fields and places in our lives, we have no answers and even negatively critical judgments about "our behavior." We are being held to incompatible standards. There exist so many conflicts with belief systems, ideologies, and spiritual and religious principles where compassion is revered. It seems that we victims have been "hoisted on our own petards."

Ms. Brown's book covers everything I questioned....and it is an affirmation that "something wicked this way comes." I don't mean to sound so melodramatic that my review is discounted. The AHA-moments were almost at every page, and most assuredly in every chapter. There is - if one enjoys science fiction - a correlation with the short-lived TV show, "Threshold." Awareness takes time. I know many on blogs are "nutters" in their own right, mostly because they have not found the data to help themselves. So many therapists have simply not understood and the "pie-in-the-sky" New

Thought folks have not come in contact with this form of "alien" presence. It's not that it is evil (maybe - ?), but the two philosophies for life - those in healthy (just the ups and downs of routine dysfunctions, perhaps) states and those suffering psychopathy are simply incompatible. Your phrase, "relationships of inevitable harm" will forever ring true to me.

Here is the BIG QUESTION - and one ripe for a new book....because the numbers of psychopaths appear to be rising, how are we to live with these beings? I understand the no contact rule and it is VITAL...but in the long run with the thought that these people cannot be treated, for humanity, what are we to do?

Every chapter in her book has dog-eared corners in my home. I carry it with me to the restroom, I return it to the coffee table...and I USE it for reference.

As always in this life, the lessons are much more about myself. AND Sandra's treatment of us victims is kind, observant, and chocked full of evaluational data. I am floored and delighted that there are explanations for super traits rather than that we have "failed" to be bright enough, wise enough, or even aware enough. I gleaned that my traits might just be valuable. Somewhere the patriarchal (and yet, I have learned that men can be victims, also) guidelines have become overly and overtly zealous. I don't believe it is as simplistic as relationships with authority that comes into question, although, our deep seated thoughts on "happily ever after" probably filters many of our personal scope of evaluations.

I am never quite as trusting as once I was...and because I have daughters and grandsons, I am alert to those in our realm and my own reactions to them. I'm not paranoid, but neither do I let a brief intuitive feeling flow past without a moment of appraisal.

I share my thoughts....so much is falling into place for me (and MANY others) because of THIS book, Women Who Love Psychopaths, in particular. I have read Brown's other works, but

this one is of monumental importance! There must be a more moving way to say this. It struck a chord of complete connection and affirmation within my very being and soul. There is REASON for the chaos into which I fell. And all with the best of intentions. It is not concisely ONE AHA-moment, but everything in the book.

The explanations cover daily life with a psychopath...the lure, the treatment, the forever changing terrain and MOST importantly the way we who fall prey respond. For me, this book relates to my daily heartaches, fears, anguish, and quest for my ideal. Not just of the relationship, but of the "me" I knew before this fear-fest of an encounter. The absolute torture was in the faltering grasp of my own humanity. AND to have AGREEMENT is CRUCIAL for survival...not just mouthed upsets and emotions, but to comprehend the why's. Interestingly, as I look over this review, I see the feelings expressed. Our society seems to be based on these very emotions and the need to join and establish rapport. Transferring our thoughts and feelings onto this "other" who is called a psychopath reminds me of Michael Crichton's book, Sphere. "What if the contact with an alien or artifact has no frame of reference for us as human beings" is the gist of the novel. It appears to have come to life today.

With profound respect and gratitude for allowing me to feel that my "style" of emotional sharing is NOT the CAUSE of the psychopath's evil in pinpointing me. It is, albeit, something to be watched and monitored by me, myself.

It'sAllAboutHim by Lisa E. Scott

In the midst of horrific anguish while freshly used, devalued, and discarded with the precision of a surgeon's scalpel in my marital relationship, I voraciously devoured reading material searching for answers to my trek through the bowels of the Twilight Zone. I was lost, alone, and terrified by the turn my life had taken, leaving me

emotionally devastated and financially decimated. I stumbled onto a site with Lisa E. Scott's book, It's All About Him, and this became the turning point for my own self-redemption and healing. Lisa frees the confusion and offers a plausible and educated evaluation with the assignment of the term, narcissist. Ms. Scott shows herself to be a real woman of flesh and blood who struggled with her own angst in similar relationships and offers well researched data on narcissism peppered with stories of others falling into the dark abyss with this chameleon of a manipulator.

She takes you by the hand to allow each survivor reading her works a path of comprehension, knowledge that we are not alone, and the amazingly awe-inspiring feeling that we are not damaged goods who sought this painful excursion into an alien realm. Much more than this gift of hope and understanding are her accompanying blog sites filled with camaraderie and the deep and earnest desire to aid each other reclaim our self-esteem and lives.

Lisa E. Scott has another powerful book following the awareness of classification, The Path Forward. This manual clearly and effectively proposes essential steps for gradational movement into recovery. Lisa becomes a valued confidante and friend in our individualized journeys to dropping the shackles of fear and self-doubt as we painstakingly incorporate mental and emotional purging and growth.

With intellect, warmth, and heartfelt compassion, Lisa has touched my being and essence. The courage to broach the topic of narcissism beyond simple defined traits and to sound the alarm that these disordered presences cannot be redeemed and must be avoided for one's sanity and productivity stands as her hallmark.

Her writings changed my perception of this dark territory and offered me a lifeline away from unaware therapists and unknowledgable friends and family whose judgments left me drowning in uncertainty. Lisa brings herself, her generosity of being, and her indomitable spirit to “ride shotgun” as she coaches us

to reach for aid, trust our instincts, and to live fully and consciously. She inspired me to write my own story. My life has been altered. I am no longer afraid and although not the same innocent I once was, I have the courage to stand for my convictions and to be fully myself, warts and all. Whether or not romance enters my future, I am OK and look toward tomorrows with fresh discernment and even an eagerness. There is nothing to hide and no attempts necessary to fit someone else's vision of me in a particular blueprint. Lisa's works transformed my vision of being a desolate “sensitive” into one of personal strength and integrity, one step at a time. My gratitude is immeasurable.

Chapter II

What my romance with “Mr. Right” Looked Like...

*“There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice,
but there must never be a time when we fail to protest.” --
Elie Wiesel*

The Butterfly Effect has come to be recognized as a phrase indicating change. This altered path comes into being with the smallest of shifts occurring at an initial point. From that moment in a dynamic, non-linear system, not only does Robert Frost's poem take effect, but a swirl of reordering from apparent chaos develops.

“...I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence: Two
roads diverged in a wood, and I-- I
took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.”

For movie lovers, the scientist played by Jeff Goldblum in “Jurassic Park” explains the theory of chaos to his traveling associate, a lady archeological investigator . Dropping a small dash of water onto her hand a few times, he shows that the direction of flow cannot be predetermined because there exist too many minute factors and variables. Each time the droplet falls and reaches her hand, the path flows differently.

The instants of change for all of us as survivors come with a small alteration of our own beliefs – about ourselves, about others, about our experiences. Finding our lives ravaged by the raw pangs of our emotional states within the manipulations of a narcissist, we grasp for comprehension. Let me offer an excerpt from my own experiences to illustrate the total confusion and heartache.

The relentless surprises from the onset of our marriage,

following a whirlwind courtship, proved extremely costly. It seems that my substantial funds vanished into the black hole of financial crises brought by my spouse and his family almost in the blink of an eye as I struggled to maintain the marriage.

His IRS debt from the past raised its ugly head. The arrival to live with us of the bipolar, alcoholic adult son with expensive legal problems set the stage for chaos and highlighted my lack of savvy in standing my ground in this alien domain, away from my family and friends. Along with this came the drunken, drugged out former sister-in-law who called incessantly, leaving explicit boy-toy messages for my spouse - I always felt such an affront all the more so because my husband really had no desire for intimacy with me and I was immediately saddled with all the household expenses and even the cell phones for his son and parents....and of course, the never totally "in the past" first wife. My mother-in-law had held her close to "the family core" through the decades since their divorce and my spouse's former re-marriage.

My invalid mother-in-law living within a half hour drive felt me to be a coupon from heaven as I planned to use my money to add to the household coffer while I worked on writing. She called 4-6 times a day and there was forever some need of chauffeuring, errand, transportation, housework requirement, help to her husband, or trip to a doctor or therapy required. I had chosen this man whom I loved and also his family and felt that the marriage vows required persistence to that commitment. I, however, was not always gracious about the unrelenting demands on my time and life energy.

After the "I do's," I learned that my partner was bipolar and we scheduled an appointment with his female therapist with whom he shared a wonderful rapport. She suggested that my taking the load of responsibility for the mother-in-law's

well being would help this man tremendously. Through time and some telephone contact - she forever stressed patient confidentiality and loyalty to my spouse - she let me know that this condition had no permanent "fix" and was lifelong. The infatuations with other women and deeper connection to his first wife had begun.

A bank levy followed involving property and co-signature in days gone by with a past love. My husband's new 24/7 job in a growing company produced unbelievable pressure and the stress levels for him skyrocketed. An unpaid and lengthy period of illness for him hit us following many episodes of health problems, finally resulting in surgery as the medical personnel attempted to "right him." During our first year and a half together, I carried the load for many of his prescriptions and medical payments. Never in my experience had I found such perpetual drama from all within my spouse's sphere.

My funds, almost \$65,000, supplied the path to safety and he began to reinvest himself in his job and with his ailing parents. I pulled my side of the yolk with my mother-in-law who shared her diagnosis as a patient of possible Asperger's Syndrome. Her calls and demands for attention, social programming, and medical requirements increased exponentially. Being wheelchair bound and later unable to transfer herself, my husband and his father left me solely to work with her and we spent hours at the ER, doctors' appointments, therapies, and exercising. Other family members only remembered this dominant personality as a "mover and shaker" of independent strides in previous years and lacked any comprehension of the role into which I had fallen. Even saying this, there was love between us – or so it seemed.

As more responsibility fell to me with time spent in chemotherapy with his aged father and staying overnight at

their home following rough episodes, the household hopefulness of new marriage expectation crumbled. I couldn't find my footing and appeared as an insane shrew. I cannot underscore enough my own mental and emotional upsets and the **havoc I wreaked on the home front**. My husband told me he had no time for a wife; he certainly didn't like me. He shared his feelings of infatuations about high ranking associates and his past online trysts.

My world careened out of control. There was no romance – his adult son living with us became a link to redoing his past, it appeared. Connections to his son's mother jumped exponentially like some growing plague from “the Andromeda Strain.” My spouse had no interest in sex or intimacy of any kind - just absence of desire to do anything solely with me. I worked as a hired hand on his property doing fencing, hauling heavy bags of cement, upgrades, and hosting family and functions - as well as footing the bill for a vast majority of activities, including chauffeuring his son with legal problems and no driver's license. In addition I put myself on the line writing on behalf of his son engulfed in criminal litigation. I was critiqued and criticized in never-ending loops of upset and drawing me back with promises of a great future. **Where had I dissolved?**

Persistence was my game plan as I believed in the concept of commitment in marriage...rational or not.

Continuing to wedge herself into some pseudo-wife slot by calling him at work, requesting groceries for him to drop by, and urging me to call him her assigned nicknames, his mother strove to make herself the dominant female – no the most important presence in everyone's life. She pushed to have me include her name on gifts I gave to him. It was all too much and too close for my tastes.

She called me on our first Christmas as a newlywed couple to demand I allow him to go away on a skiing trip with "the boys" to

ease his stress from work and the marriage. She questioned me about our intimacies and wanted to bond over the lack of sex in both our marriages...she had a strikingly and uncomfortably odd interest in my spouse's sexual prowess. I sought answers and felt some ill fortune of emotional incest might be at play. This was like a terrible episode of the sitcom, "Everybody loves Raymond."

As I tumbled head over heels in free fall , I thought my honor required that I remain constantly participating in this marriage for Both my husband and myself. I searched for answers and surmised that the mother might be perpetrating emotional incest on my husband. Nothing in my large family background prepared me for this land at the bottom of "the rabbit hole." And there appeared no escape.

Fighting to keep myself and still maintain the union, I worked as a contractor for many weeks at the small and growing company where my husband had supplied his devotion and received deep levels of appreciation and even adoration. I found myself in the same inherent unpredictability that existed in my personal life, albeit, now with a break from his mother's to-do lists. There I watched in unexpected upset as the VP apparently sexually harassed a bright, attractive field supervisor. While attempting to carry on professionally – needing her job and trying to protect that of her significant other, also a supervisor – the distaste and confusion found itself written on her face daily. The good old boys in the office turned a blind eye. It was like living "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest." I finally departed that post following several weeks without pay reaching contract personnel and services. It seemed insanity existed everywhere.

My spouse's material "wishes" such as a boat, camper, motor home, and Harley Davidson found me floundering as an entity of any validity. I required knee surgery and the man I married stayed at the hospital during the procedure as his boss let him know that was expected. Returning home, he went to bed early leaving me alone to try to maneuver crutches to fill an ice-cooling machine for my knee.

His mother had let him know that this surgery was mild and required no extra care for me. After nursing him round the clock during many illnesses, a viral infection found me once. He was unable or unwilling to help me. This underscored my place in the family unit and my flaccid condition as a being of worth – not only in their eyes, but in my own.

In the throes of bankruptcy, he wasn't able to help me. Because my vanishing funds failed to answer his request to rent a house down the road from his ailing parents, he moved our camper which we upgraded to a motor home onto his folks' property. Unwilling to share the bathroom and be at his mother's constant calls round-the-clock, I moved to my house two hours away. My funds were to have allowed me to aid my daughter with a career while I made a small income by watching her sons, one with severe health problems. My spouse had become an important member of my little clan and the grandsons, ages 3 and 4, loved him. And then, there were all the promises of “tomorrows” with hopeful expectation. Looking back, I was horribly naive. The mother's sister and brother and the ex-wife of a son thought of her as a saint. Was I missing something? Was I not understanding a larger family?

I continued to visit almost every weekend where I was his mom's caregiver, shopper, provider of housework and lawn care as well as helping the father. It was painful to watch the dysfunctional relationship between my spouse and his perfectionist father. I helped the dad wash and hang curtains and we had to measure every pleat for exactness and every point along the rod - the drain on energy was amazing. Nothing my spouse did was ever correct enough *and this very fact tied me more strongly to “be there” for my spouse*. With failed marriages under my belt, I honestly believed I could “love it into being.”

I acknowledged that the strain on my spouse was immense, giving exorbitant amounts of “positive energy” to him in my attempts to put my belief systems into play. He withdrew and took a vacation with

his first wife, visiting his adult sons. I was shaken and wounded and acted as I were mentally unbalanced. She remained always a peripheral player in the picture of his life. Other women, I discovered, had taken their leave of this insane asylum and vanished, avoiding all contact. Now, with my knowledge and awareness, I can understand this “no contact” rule. Back in this period of my life, I was shipwrecked and stranded out of my depth. Some “female” health concerns reached my state of consciousness and I had myself tested for venereal disease. Fortunately, I had none. Not until much later did I accumulate the evidence of many online romances by my spouse. Re-connections with facebook “once-upon-a-timers.”

The daughters of long ago passions seemed to trigger a sense of grandiosity in my partner. I was drowning in a sea of disbelief and utter devastation. The lifeline of my old belief systems simply couldn't keep up with each new episode of upset and my responses. The strength of mind and spirit I felt to be part of my essence crumbled.

The voice-mail he left was bitter toward me for failing him. The litany of unpleasantness he had experienced in previous relationships, he managed to replicate with me within the first year of our marriage, almost as a cleansing process. Still believing the idea of working through problems to keep the marriage alive, I plead with him to talk to me and go to counseling. He agreed - with his therapist, not the wisest choice, but the only way the session could occur. I broached the topic of covert incest being perpetrated by the mother. The conference seemed to go smoothly and additional times were scheduled. His therapist assured me that he "was a good man and wanted to be a good provider." Apparently his use of silent treatments was considered acceptable as she reminded me that I couldn't have disagreements with him “head on”....I would have to first get his agreement for a time and place appropriate. Unfortunately, with his 24/7 job and his parents' needs, there was no acceptable time allocation. I was to go along with the agenda. I was being an aid to him by taking on so much within the relationship and handling the burden of his mother, and his therapist

wanted me to remember this.

What in the world was wrong with this picture? Why did I stand for this in my life? **WHERE was I?**

That one session was the end of counseling. He immediately canceled the additional time slots with no word to me. Calling the therapist to verify the next contact, she coldly relayed via her receptionist that he was her client alone. I felt confused and once again out-of-focus. I can't say that I would have viewed myself any differently with the data coming from him. I felt like the song lyrics from "The Sound of Music" where describing the nuns' feelings of being out-of-focus with the whirl of their young charge's energies and chaos.

There had been such reaching and withdrawal from him along the path of our troubled marriage coupled with threats of divorce whenever I was unable to acquiesce to some material desire. Whenever his much appreciated manager had relationship difficulties, our life also fell into that pattern, as if to mirror the company's style. Our last reconciliation had occurred just a month prior to this.. He had joyfully made plans for a vacation with me, upgrading my washing machine at the house because I had given my new one to his mother, and creating a solarium with hot tub. The constant sense of being off balance surfaced again.

I finally allowed my brain to process that my money was the primary interest to him. On our last time together, the reality of my financial state and absence of any stash of funds registered with him. Within two weeks he had planned a future with another gal and was winging his way in some high adventure. It was over. I had declined to be a caregiver for his mom. When the step-father died just following our last visit, my spouse's out-of-town brothers and their wives came for the "dance of mourners" and played their roles to the hilt. His new lady-fair was rallied into the "clan." I was expunged...erased...

It was as though I had never existed. All the nights I spent with the aged and declining father, following bad spells in chemotherapy, transporting him to medical appointments and staying with him at the nursing staff's requests, hours talking with him and helping him in his garage simply faded. The three days per week for a year and a half that I gave to the invalid, wheelchair bound mother to be her care provider, housekeeper, yard work aid, errand runner, and supplier of additional funds for groceries and prescriptions...the repayment of my spouse's loans to the couple...all began to vanish in thoughts and memories as if the timekeepers in Stephen King's "Langoliers" had come to life.

The entire grouping of family members needed to reboot their existences and show a united front. They seemed to have decided to reinvent the family, its members, the histories shared and put an entirely new spin on the mother's reality and that of my spouse's choices, irresponsibility, flagrant abuse of me, and present emotional standing. There would be no goodbyes. There would be no closure. There would – for some time – be no sense of understanding and no reason behind the production so much like John Carpenter's horror story, "In the Mouth of Madness." I, too, had interacted and added exquisite twists on my unbelievably and unearthly all-too-real nightmare.

No wonder his therapist felt I might have attachment disorder. I was never privy to the content of their sessions. She remained keenly connected to his privacy and I, in the dark about his version of the storyline being fed to her, existed in an exquisitely detached purgatory. I was receiving the reach-and-withdraw scenario and silent treatments for days on end. Then, the grand shows of renewed affection along with gusto at a continued union. Never, however, an apology. No wonder the diagnosis of codependency falls all-so-often into the mix. For lack of the professional terminology, "I was SCREWED UP."

After just three short years, I was a morphed version of myself...and not at all "better."

Chapter III

Left on My Own

"Half the harm that is done in this world Is due to people who want
to feel important.

They don't mean to do harm — but the harm does not interest them.

Or they do not see it, or they justify it Because
they are absorbed in the endless struggle To think
well of themselves."

~T.S. Elliott

My first thoughts after I found myself so unceremoniously discarded were to find someone else who might ease the pain of this thwarted romance. I really knew that finding any kind of suitable male partner with whom to consummate a togetherness would alleviate the angst – for awhile, but only for a brief moment in time. At that stage I just hoped to somehow squelch the deep sadness. I did, however, recognize that I needed time to simply be myself, be by myself, and to trust that the woman I'd discover would be worthwhile. Fortunately, the Fates put no interested parties in my path...I would have to go this agony - and pretty much by myself. I found some blogs which allowed the leeway to groan and express all the hidden fears. My family members were loving – in spite of being worn out by the maddening roller coaster of emotions I exhibited in this relationship and my apparent lunacy in forcefully determining to make a go of the marriage – in spite of reality camping on my door step.

My search to comprehend the drastic changes in my life's direction AND my place in the scheme of things had me reading anything viably close to what I had experienced. I read voraciously. I stumbled upon the concept of narcissism and this defined “essence” so clearly mimicked my own personal ride into the previously unknown to me stretches of Hades.

Sandra L. Brown and her book, [HowtoSpotaDangerousMan](#)

Before You Get Involved, led me to her site:
saferelationships.com. Was I in a pathological relationship?

Something about my introduction to the idea of narcissism struck a chord. A personal look at the disorder and its consequences were open to view at narcissism101.com. Even the TV personality Dr. Drew has been talking about this.

A definition that I found excellent is the pattern of traits and behaviors which involve obsession with one's self to the exclusion of the awareness of others and how they are affected. It involves a ruthless pursuit of ambition, dominance, and gratification (wordig.com/definition/narcissism. The two markers that I could so readily agree with are the fragile ego and self-esteem and the lack of empathy. These traits are severe and yet the individual can present so very well. In his chameleon-like life, my partner was adept at reading situations – most of the time – and was facile in his ability to change.

One of the most diabolical tags to pin on the recipient of a narcissist's energies is the word, codependent. I find myself at odds with that immediately. This seems to be a very old school approach to evaluating the “victim.” With the labeling of the recipient of the narcissist's litany of upset and his reach and withdrawal techniques, we contribute to allowing the narcissist to slide in the area of accountability. My now ex-spouse's female therapist held him in high regard

Because I fought to keep the marriage, she tossed the idea that I might have attachment disorder. Our use of her as a marriage counselor – even for one time – was not in the best interest of the marriage. I truly was at a disadvantage. I had no idea that he had wanted out and told her so. The professed love and desire to create a life together, through all life's bumps had me working overtime to make a go of this – never realizing it was all a show. Being a viable and special partner to him was not a permanent slot for me. I had always felt a lack of gusto in the intimacy department, but the

excuses of a new job and stress made sense. I wanted to be kind and appreciative. Being sensitive in an empathic way more reasonably describes those of us who have not only fallen prey, but who have been sought by the self-ordained “one.” Sympathy requires more of a down-scale attitude. In sympathy, there exists a parallel of susceptibility of life's experiences. Whereas, sensitivity seems inclusive while valuing the other individual. It would appear that the narcissist is trying valiantly to be well rounded in his life position.

Those offering sympathy shower another with attitudes of “you poor dear.” But the narcissist apparently comprehends this system of balancing the scales to be too heavily stacked on the one side. He seems to strive to encompass a more well situated person to complete himself. In this sense, it's not at all like the “Jerry Maguire” idea of a love partner “completing his counterpart.” The feel of the vanishing strengthening-associate is more along the lines of the victim of a sycophant. Unfortunately, instead of living symbiotically, the narcissist seeks to prove that he is enough by himself alone.

The results to the sensitive are more invasive than just denigrating that being; they include the attempt to erase her presence once the need has been served. The paradox in narcissism would be the need to form a strong, safe unit while proving anything beyond himself remains extraneous and unnecessary.

So, why do we who are the sensitive in the relationship struggle with such angst? Perhaps we catch a glimpse of a formidable quality of greatness that might exist - if any of the acting had the slightest basis of truthful emotion. The associate was sought and even courted during that grand phase of “being in love” only to be **un-chosen** once the emotional vampire became OK for a while. To need a romantic alliance on the one hand, only to hate that poverty in conscious feeling on the other must be a living nightmare for the one existing within the bubble of egomania. But, perhaps that is attributing too much within humanity's description to this creature.

The narcissist uses the doctrine that individual self-interest is the valid end of all actions. In egotism, there exists a sense of exaggerated self importance. And there is a difference in the context of being self absorbed. With egoism, the accountability philosophy falls away.

Chapter IV

Camelot's Round Table

“Every day you either see a scar or courage. Where you dwell will define your struggle.”

~ Dodinsky

Against all reason, the heartache of being so unceremoniously duped and dumped clung to me like some invisible straight jacket. Sandra L. Brown talks about the “inevitable harm” from any relationship which **MUST** follow in one with a psychopath. I always felt my goodness had been twisted and turned against me...and the greatest anguish of heightened pain in excruciating manner came with my knowledge that I had allowed this to happen to me. The tentacles of a deranged state of mind had interwoven themselves among my own beliefs, honorable intentions, and connection to life itself. This was a science-fiction play moving into this plane of existence. Fear became my daily companion. Had I **EVER** existed?

Yes...the answer is **YES**. There are so many kind souls who did not judge me. Robert O'Connor, a therapist who can be found on facebook, is one among many. Another is the bankruptcy attorney, Richard Samson of Missoula, who couldn't help me as an individual, but surely exuded kindness in his role as trustee handling my spouse's indebtedness. Somewhere and somehow as my life was unraveling, I gathered the gumption to contact my spouse's attorney in time to file as a creditor in my spouse's bankruptcy proceedings. Some divine intervention shook me by the shoulders because at this intersection of the story, I was rattled, dazed, unbelievably confused...**AND STILL** feeling it would all work out...somehow.

The Powers That Be gently forced my hand. By this time, I had experienced an astounding and alarmingly fearful crisis of faith. There were those who wanted to label me and find some horrific flaws in my past that could explain it all, permitting this participation in events to be categorized and filed safely away from a need to deal

with the repercussions. It was like being on the out-of-water end of the quickly sinking Titanic. There was no escape. I didn't ask "why has God allowed this," but "is there EVEN a god?" Had all my beliefs and high flying New Thought, upbeat wisdom ever existed as valuable and worthwhile forces of energy? I was more terrified than I had ever been in my 58 years.

When giving birth to my daughters, I had life and death situations due to complications, but then I had my faith and belief systems on which to hold fast. Now, there was a blank slate and nothing to ease the learning process. The overriding awareness was that this "trek through the bowels of the Twilight Zone" had been REAL. It was still "real."

Distance away from the rigors of "the clan" and the narcissist did not eliminate the daily hum of thoughts about them, how and why I had evaluated as I did, who I was, and what I was now to do. The expanse of separation DID allow me to release my endless quest to ask the never ending loop of questions of others. I had in my darker moments plucked strangers from grocery store lines to share my tale and pray that they might offer some morsel of understanding which could form an infinitesimal nugget of truth on which to build.

During this "dark night of the soul," I stumbled upon books and blog sites. I discovered I was not alone in this sea of putrid reality. There were others writing and distributing ideas along with their own narratives. This wasn't "home" in the sense that one could rest and rejuvenate. It was, however, a safety net to grab. And I hung on.

Such guilt surfaced. I had failed devastatingly. My hopes and dreams, and romantic images had been quashed. My material wealth, inheritance, retirement, and lifetime of savings had evaporated, always with the promise of having time to regroup. I had failed my daughters and grandchildren. My plans to supply funds for the purchase of homes, trips to expand their horizons, money to make their lives just a little easier – all were drained and awash because there incontrovertibly would be no way to recoup.

I have needed to let that culpability and self-reproach slide into the past. My focus will be in survival now.

Let's remember what we have discovered in our journey into no-man's land...Science doesn't support the concept that this is ONLY a psychological disorder of personality divergence from mainstream population. Perhaps it might be true of some labeled as a narcissist, but there is also something terribly destructive in another segment labeled with "narcissistic personality disorder." It presents the overwhelming prospect of incontrovertible harm to any who have met the new, detrimentally "improved" war machine of the NPD.

They are bright, adaptable, quite cunning in their manipulative skills and prepared to do whatever is necessary to make themselves feel better and look more acceptable, often turning the tables on the victim. We now can detail and expose just what the victim finds her life to become - AND WHY. The super-glue attraction (and no, it's NOT codependency), trance-like suggestibility, disintegration of the victim causing her to feel she can't leave....and the total absence of remorse on the part of the perpetrator all form the backdrops to life with these individuals. We use the phrase, "lack of empathy," almost cavalierly. It is as if dealing with an alien species that has NO concept of our values, belief systems, and communication expectations toward safety in sharing.

The existence of a benign version of the "beast" may be present, HOWEVER, that should be relabeled. For any who have been completely blindsided and treated as the feast for the attacking vampire-entity, it has resulted in "INEVITABLE HARM" (S. Brown) on so many levels to the victim. We must not think that the narcissist carries a lesser evil in his/her pursuit of well being. It/he/she does not improve by thinking it so. There will be no alteration that makes this being comprehensible. This condition is becoming pandemic AND it is changing the definition of humanity and our society's structure.

However, there is now a beginning awareness. There exist so many

of us out there in the world at large. “Something wicked *really* this way comes.” As time has dulled the offensive agony of the torture to my own soul and sense of being-ness, I find there remains much for which to be grateful. The consciousness of benefits in this life has begun to fill my heart once more. It's a start. I had wanted to make a difference.

“You can gain more friends by being yourself than you can by putting up a front. You can gain more friends by building people up than you can by tearing them down. And you can gain more friends by taking a few minutes from each day to do something kind for someone, whether it be a friend or a complete stranger. What a difference one person can make!”~ Sasha Azevedo

My last tango of a marriage and its drawing down the curtain on the last act of that particular play has left me quieter, but finally, not unhappy.

My brother, 2 ½ years my junior, has always been a man of honor and integrity. We found ourselves in a decade long estrangement due some to our mom and much to his now ex-wife.

Communication which was always huge in our lives, took a “time out” in that period. With mom's last days approaching, we broached any real and imagined differences and took steps toward reclaiming the strong bonds of love and loyalty that had engulfed us in our early lives together.

He and his present fiancé represent my hopes and dreams of envisioned rationale in the “life together with commitment” scenario. I want them to have joy and bliss and travel this highway of love and laughter...with just enough challenge to make the trip breath-taking and inspiring. I want the very same possibilities for my two daughters in their own lives.

At 59, I suspect I've taken down my “romance at all costs” shingle from my front doorway. But, I'll look in on it and shine it from time to time. I did seek that elusive “Camelot” of high adventure with its

invention of fanciful sentiment. Although I did encounter and even initiate heroically marvelous deeds in the quest for my evasive dream, the lighthearted zest more than occasionally found itself dashed by life's details and unexpectedness.

AND with all the exasperation, it truly was worth the passage.

So, now, with a limited arsenal of skills, I can share my story with you. You can survive. I have. YOU have so much more to offer this world than the years of confusion made you think. Reach out to many...take a step....search for rekindled visions and inspired emotions. Always be thankful for the gifts in this lifetime, no matter what difficulties may also come along. So many of us will be here for you. Remember falling on the playground, bloodying your knees? It never occurred to you not to get up. That's still inside you – and each of us. We are a bit like a bag of M&M's...many colors and all uniquely whole...We might be a little melted, but we're still here.

“God made Truth with many doors to welcome every believer who knocks on them.” ~ Kahlil Gibran

However, that grabber emotion – the same intensity which caught us each in a trap with the narcissist/psychopath – was mandated to close the circuit and ignite truth...infuse courage...and liberate valor. Betty LaLuna spoke with emotion and aggressively refreshing realization that we, the survivors, must acknowledge it all – our choices, the heartbreak, the essence of being targeted, and the connection to each other as we all, both men and women, worked through the out-of-focus sense of ruptured time and belief that had come to us in this strangely lit continuum. She brought her velocity of spirit to the written page on facebook and our new-found awareness took flight.

Within her musings all of us victims/survivors discovered unabashed beauty, human fallibility, and wisdom. We had forgotten that we each had a spark of Divine light within us; we had been so beaten

down and almost mortally wounded. This is the legacy of Betty LaLuna. It is easy to sense and feel her heart, soul, and even the anguish of her own journey. The utter SPUNK that kept her moving forward, pushed me to continue plugging away....She is REAL...her life has been no fairy tale. This camaraderie grew from much more than comparable aspects of this state where knowledge was gained.

We all had our developing stories through direct observation and participation. The corresponding evolutions of all of us were the road map for directions out of Hades. All of us who are survivors exist on a path of our own inner domains...and yes, demons. And, yet, we are not alone – much due to the animating principles of life offered so freely on the blog.

In some instances certain members on blog sites railed against others through frustration, pain, and fear. As a moderator of style and moral-discipline, Ms. LaLuna rose above judgment and held a steady course for all of us to follow. At a time in my life when my heart cried in agony, despair, and total confusion, she spoke to me, and so many others, with her candor and the reality of constant renewal in living every day - putting food on the table in the midst of personal upheaval, handling responsibilities, shoring the dikes of everyday living, and putting one foot in front of the other. Betty LaLuna gave us hope...made us laugh, allowed us to cry, and offered a hand to climb out of the swamp of disbelief to begin to climb into our own NEWLY refurbished reality. With irreverence, wit, and unflappable grace, she reminds each of us to be the best of which we are capable under such trying circumstances and with the information at hand. Our factual information, reasoning, and ability to process after being shattered increases constantly and we are prodded by the heart of the blog and its members to continue – sometimes in inches, and once-in-a-while in leaps. We have accepted that forgiveness is part of the path, but it is indeed a long course of proceedings. To relinquish a sense of requital exists separately from burying one's head in the sand with the hope it might all simply go quietly into the night. The desolation found by so many victims must be recognized and validated. The crux of successful

blog sites is to raise its member to the realm of warriors of truth and decency. As Sandra L. Brown so clearly explains, we who have survived carried super traits that when mixed with the pathological presence formed a highly volatile and quite toxic “cocktail of attraction.” Those essences of hyper-connectivity, high relationship investment, skyrocket levels of compassion, and the willingness to take risks have a place in our world, but most assuredly NOT with a psychopath. Finally, relinquishing the fear of our own choices that led to the mess of our present lives, we can stand on our own two feet and see not only who we are but of what we are truly capable. We survivors need not hide, being afraid our own foibles will be seen. We stand as a bucket brigade, offering a hand to the next one in line. The time has come to question the old forms of information. This land of pathological influence must give way to our indivisible whole selves and our Don Quixote image. The meek must be careful not to inherit the dirt. .

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Chapter V

A Master's Degree Program

“Today's Rainbow : The Rabbit Hole Really IS the Tree of
Knowledge
When the Mist of life with a Narcissist Evaporates” ~
BReed

Love doesn't always bring the curtain down on a happily-ever-after theme. Even so, I sought enough good times to offer balance with life's rough patches. Meeting “my particular” narcissist proved such a disconcerting trek into unknown territory. Loving and losing as I have described in my journey's discourse was to be a learning experience beyond any I could have fashioned in my wildest fantasies.

With a narcissist, it felt like a Master's Degree program on shifting sands.

I had participated in acquiring practical knowledge in the arena of romance and relationships. Now, at 58, I can admit that I have been a tool for learning for others as well as being affected by the nuances of this search for connectedness within love myself. With age and some maturity under my belt, I felt myself to be realistic.

With my new spouse, I held such joyful expectation – in the beginning.

I was fully aware of changes and altered choices along the sometimes rocky path to romance. This is such an example – where narcissism was not the chief player. In my once playful look at romance and finding that wonderful partner with whom to grow old, I had both joys and sorrows – all within normal parameters of dating and wandering through the halls of relationships.

I find myself much in agreement with the scientist/physicist, Nassim

Haramain. Perhaps creating this reality of 3-D existence isn't quite as the New Age folks suggest. It involves more than putting out vibrations of what you wish to manifest. There is a cycle of activity wherein we are affected by others and our created world is also affected by others, as we contribute to the wholeness of their masterpieces. In my story of romance that didn't quite reach that fairy tale summit, I learned a great deal about love and the ability to give without requiring a specified outcome.

“Reaching” is a wonder. It's dramatic and exciting...and occasionally a bit heavily spiced with drama. In looking at loving others, we are also discovering how to love ourselves.

A reasonable Story

Reaching...What it looks like without psychopathy

“Man has gone long enough, or even too long, without being man enough to face the simple truth that the trouble with man is man.”

~James Thurber

Do you think the world is ready for an Erma Bombeck of the divorce crowd? I might well play the role with five – count them – five marriages under my belt. So often we of the “failed union” sect have been coerced into a sense of inadequacy. The word failure means a lack of success, an unfavorable outcome of a venture. I wonder if that is true in divorce - in all divorces, at any rate. A continuation of the marriage was not created, but the result is totally within our control to map our own futures. Universal laws exist which may be explained by the actions of cause and effect. We are accountable for our choices, and by accepting this responsibility, we reclaim the acts, their precipitated results, and therefore our own individualized power

in the creation of our own lives.

At one time, the need to circumvent divorce offered a protection for the woman whose sole livelihood fell upon the shoulders of a male spouse. Today's culture paints humorous and sometimes painful offshoots to this premise of old; often, women take the brunt of the financial burden. The line from the movie, "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade" comes to mind where the knight guarding the Holy Grail quietly states the obvious. The villain, having chosen the wrong chalice from which to drink, dies horrendously. The knight matter-of-factly explains, "he chose poorly."

Having experienced this phase of the contract myself, I find myself not bitter, but with a distinct longing for "romance" with a capital "R." It would be glorious to be valued for the unique and even eccentric woman that I am. Even as a liberated female, I still believe that the partnership formed by a couple bolsters the strengths of both, galvanizes the union as a safe haven as well as the base from which to explore and "try our wings" as a unit and as separate entities. This unity provides the accessibility of communication, which serves as the platform for new creation as well as sustaining the status quo of day to day living.

If the dream exists for the format of a union, holds enough viable drive for its manifestation, and can be guided with thought toward the best of survival for both parties, the ripple-effect should prove beneficial for each person, the couple, and all the peripheral life forces touching the couple. We need not lose ourselves to become part of a partnership. Each individual brings unique qualities. I suspect that we woman have not always been valued for the continuity, beauty, and structure which we supply.

I have noted with some interest that in this struggle for feminist actualization, we may have lost some footing in this arena. Often women seem to be valued for the posts they may hold, the income they might provide, and their physical beauty. As

individuals, we possess souls, thoughts, emotions, and drive, too. We might choose to revamp society's emphasis.

So, what do we of the unwed set do to initiate contact with someone who might be just the right compliment to us? It is funny to me that we hear so much about the world growing smaller. I live in a small town in a state based on rural economy. The financial balances of this area mandate working in a slightly larger city about twenty miles away. Women populate my job arena and my personal slot of activity takes place in nocturnal solitude.

Therefore, I am trying my wings – with common sense – on the Internet via personals. One of my most charming and delightful communicants exists with a man beyond this continent. A brush with psychology might indicate the freedom of this liaison to be its very nature of the unattainable – distance and the cost of travel. The plus reigns as a boost to my libido and jaunt into “possibilities.”

Although this could be the magical component to romance with a capital “R,” my ideal connection precipitates “real time” shared life experiences. Of course, there can be only ONE first meeting, but the ultimate goal remains to create the monogamous romance newly. I met a marvelous gentleman – bright, witty, challenging, an intellectual with a pronounced enjoyment of physical intimacy.

Our contact occurred through a literary friend who thought our senses of humor and writing styles posed a symmetry of sorts. He was absolutely correct. The gentleman and I exhibited marked “heat” in our meetings. Surprisingly to me, after validations of love were voiced, the fellow admitted he hoped and needed to “end “ his search for the ideal mate with a woman possessing all my inner characteristics, but also the physical attributes of a magazine model.

How could I respond to such a wish when I look like the character in the movie, “The Truth about Cats and Dogs”, in

which the rather plain heroine, albeit intellectual and funny, is mistaken to be that of a gorgeous female. The male lead falls in love with the “package,” experiencing confusion and a sense of betrayal upon learning that the spirit of the woman for whom he has become enamored does not reside within the body of a model. In the film version, the man finally discovers he loves the essence of the less than beautifully perfect, but bright and humorous lady – and her physical attributes become secondary in importance. Reality offered another scenario in my case. The gentleman decided to continue searching for his “ideal” woman, to include the ravishing exterior.

I wonder just how much this says about our culture. I fell in love with this man through our emails, telephone calls, and sharing of written documents telling of our innate philosophies and ethical responses to life’s challenges. I had never before experienced the connection radiating such an effervescence of life energy.

Deriving insights, the two of us dropped our defenses, bared our souls and fragile ideas, and evolved into a mutually appreciative friendship involving trust and honor. Our “real time” meetings could have produced sparks with our linking of the spiritual and sexual appetites.

The bond between us expanded each of us, but it fulfilled only me. The gentleman sought more idealized physical beauty than I possess. Short of plastic surgery, I am unable to comply and thus, cannot fit the bill for his life-long “mate.” So, how can I explain my loss of the union I felt to be an actual “calling”?

Because the man is far from shallow (despite my description of our estranged needs), I suspect two points developed for him: one was that he became too involved, making the next step of a commitment the only direction for his path to propel him forward, and two, by clinging to his ideal of “perfection,” he could not move forward with me, the entity possessing some of his dream characteristics but not the entire illusion’s “shell.”

Needless to say, pain radiated on both sides with this realization

of our predicament. I struggled valiantly, attempting to convince him (and me) that I was a desirable woman as well as enlightened and that our union would benefit us both in all areas, including the bedroom. The tale did not conclude in a storybook ending. Each of us slid to the point of forgiving the other for our personal preferences and desires to be able to create “all of our illusion.” “Casablanca’s” script line of surrender; “we’ll always have Paris” seems appropriate as an ending. We have our strong and loving friendship.

Hope does indeed spring eternal! The closer I move toward antiquity, the more knowledgeable I become about me. Surely, that must promise the successful outcome of an appropriate union – one of appreciation, respect, physical intimacy, responsibility, and lots of laughter! A quote from Bix Bender comes to mind, “a gate only works if a corral comes with it.” Let’s make our own corrals worth opening the gate.

I wonder if passion can really exist with a person who feels solely in line with Destiny. There is a marvelous story by Henry James, “The Beast in the Jungle.” John Marcher is forever expecting some monumentally notable fate to befall him. May Bertram becomes his friend and confidante, offering an amazing depth of compassion and companionship. Marcher sees her as an adjunct to his life and never fully recognizes her uniqueness or connection to him, the man.

Suffering ill health, she makes a striking plea for him to accept her love for him as she shakily stands at their last meeting before life’s flow leaves her. He is incapable of understanding the gesture and continues along his mental route of titillating watchfulness for that moment when destiny meets him. Excessive pride and self-involvement kept real life at bay with Archer. Always seeking that illusive unspecified thing in his future had him forfeit passion – of any kind. And that was Fate’s amazing “something” that pounced

upon his awareness at the end of his search. He had allowed absolutely nothing of passionate depth into his existence.

Being a romantic, I look back over my marriage to the narcissistic spouse and can see so much of John Marcher in him. In our case, I would have striven to continue. Perhaps by coldly removing my tether ropes to him, he sought yet again to find that perfectly flawless connection and relationship. I cannot help but wonder if he forever tried to remake his history with his mother where this time there would be not only accolades for him as her son, but that she might applaud him as a distinctly unique and separate force of presence. Instead, mental illness and a mighty fortress of pharmaceuticals held the post of his medicine cabinets.

To attempt to have the reader comprehend this horror story and not feel it's all oh-so dramatic from a "victim's" capacity, I would urge everyone who comes to these books to find the film, "The Night Listener." It was written by Amistead Maupin and stars Robin Williams. The tale is an excursion into horror for anyone of ethical standards. William's character is a night radio show host who is given a moving manuscript written by a young boy who was horrifically abused. His social worker now has custody of him. As William's character is drawn deeper into the emotional entanglement with these two, he begins to question their actual identities and even his own reality in the way he connects with them. He is a man of genuinely high levels of warmth, love, and deep empathy.

We accompany the host into a dark terrain in which he discovers - after much investment - that the entire production has been only a fabricated charade. Because the social worker had only been viewed, and the child only heard on the telephone, it comes as an unbelievably shocking moment when the host recognizes there exists no abused boy. The woman calling herself the social worker created the entire scenario - to gain love, standing, social continuity for all those in the community who aided and trusted her, and also, the monetary benefits from the manuscript if published. It allows the audience to feel the "out-of-space and time" sensations of the host as he works to sort his compassion, awareness of intellect, and

his own desire to believe in this young boy about whom he deeply cares. Not only is the protagonist left to sort the feelings of loss of a someone who never existed and the relationship that developed, but he must also handle this feeling of excruciating vulnerability.

This movie brought back the anguish of my own “fairy tale” within a fairy tale. It didn’t end in the happily-ever-after style.

Chapter VI

Believe

“I've put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that's the only way of insuring one's immortality.” ~James Joyce

I have to admit that a sense of humor – either during or sometime after events – kept my life moving forward many times, one step at a time. I could easily be the quintessential poster child for failed romances and the last one with a narcissist surely took me into the realm of eerily uncanny expeditions to the dark side. I believe that I understand something of the phenomenon of New Thinking as shown by Eckhart Tolle and his premise (as with so many others in this particular path of thought) that there is only the Now. Because living entails an emotional response, that “Now” is a point in time where we not only observe ourselves in dramas and settings, but where we feel the emotional flows of energy emanating from our views in that scenario.

Anyone who exists within time frames also looks at the future, responsibility, cause and effect, choices of the past, and the precipitate of fallout from any specific action taken in response to a stimulus of some sort. But, what I have come to see for myself is that our emotional responses to “something” will not alter the occurrence...it does, however, make being in that present time more acceptable or frightening/upsetting, depending on the point of introspection.

With utter despair and excruciating distress, I discovered myself discarded by a spouse and his family when my funds had run dry and anything I offered of myself produced no useful end for them. I began searching desperately to find a way to cope with MY NOW. The pain of loss was almost unbearable – much more so than any other relationship breakup in my personal experience. I feel that my

discovery of the term with its ideas, narcissism, answered my driving need to label this phenomenon.

In the midst of horrific anguish while freshly used, devalued, and discarded with the precision of a surgeon's scalpel in my marital relationship, I voraciously devoured reading material searching for answers to my trek through the bowels of the Twilight Zone. I was lost, alone, and terrified by the turn my life had taken, leaving me emotionally devastated and financially decimated. I stumbled onto a site with Lisa E. Scott's book, It's All About Him, and this became the turning point for my own self-redemption and healing. I found well researched data on narcissism peppered with stories of others falling into the dark abyss with this chameleon of a manipulator and in this information, an introduction to Sam Vaknin and his work, Malignant Self Love, Narcissism Revisited. There is a path of comprehension that I needed to find. Just as in the movie, "I, Robot," where we discover that even these beings of other-than-flesh-and-blood presence tend to group together when stored away from activity, I, too, needed to *know* that I wasn't alone. What I sought was some kind of understanding of what had occurred, a sense of camaraderie to counteract the responses of friends and family, and most importantly, the amazingly awe-inspiring feeling that we – specifically, me - might not be damaged goods who sought this painful excursion into an alien realm.

Thomas Sheridan in his Perplexing People, relates that many feel they have come in contact with an alien force. A total absence of empathy in the narcissist shocks those associated with the individual.

Although the narcissist has learned by social conditioning to observe and mimic emotions to fit into social structure, there usually exists continual drama and chaos in his realm.

The "sensitive" as coined by Scott, which I so much prefer to "codependent," strives to fathom the uncharted experience when compared to past relationships and teachings about communication offering an avenue for connection.

Eventually - and the time frame for healing may continue for about two years – each of us rummaging through our beliefs following this excursion into total confusion, will change her/his personal vision of desolation into one of strength, integrity, and the ability to reclaim her life.

I detested the idea that seemed to predominate within the ranks of therapists that codependency was *only* bad and indicative of my own deep rooted “illness.” In a period of my life when just emerging from continual chaos and turmoil, this itself, seemed like a conspiracy to eradicate any validation of my own experiences. It seemed much too simplistic in fostering the idea that low self-esteem was the problem in all instances, to be “cured” in the victim. Even if the intentions of counselors were good, they certainly created sustained roadblocks for a willingness to communicate freely for fear of being chastised with labels. This, indeed, was my own movie played in the midst of a strangely entangled family with my marriage to a man I believe to be a narcissist. What I found tremendously distasteful was the thought that my response to a genuinely horrific experience was pathological itself.

Through reading books and joining blog sites, I found it to be true that I had begun to effectively climb a course of purposely essential steps of gradational movement into recovery. It's a most individualized journey to dropping the shackles of fear and self-doubt as I painstakingly incorporated mental and emotional purging and growth. Being tested in a very unique way, I, too, have found my own nodding acquaintance with intellect, warmth, and heartfelt compassion. I discovered that I needed to change my perceptions and ideas on past teachings regarding other people and even the hallmarks of communication. My track of development included rethinking my own conduct in this dark territory and with some difficulty, offered me a lifeline away from unaware therapists and knowledgeable friends and family whose judgments left me drowning in uncertainty. Learning to trust my choices and again to live consciously has been a most enlightening procedure.

My life has been altered. I am finally no longer afraid and although not the same innocent I once was, I have the courage to stand for my convictions and to be fully myself, warts and all. Whether or not romance enters my future, I am OK and look toward tomorrows with fresh discernment and even an eagerness. There is nothing to hide and no attempts necessary to fit the vision of someone else for me in a particular blueprint. I have now transformed my vision of myself as being a desolate “sensitive” into one of personal strength and integrity, one step at a time. My gratitude to energies in this universe and all who shared their testimonials with me is immeasurable.

Perhaps in seeking a romantic dream state, I've discovered just how magnificent humanity can be. We strive for goodness, on the whole. We find ourselves bloodied and bowed, and yet we rise to face another day. It's an adventure...a trek of self-exploration.

Chapter VII

Nebulous Concept

“...what is there in a storm that moves me so ? Why am I so much better and stronger and more certain of life when a storm is passing ? I do not know, and yet I love a storm more, far more, than anything in nature.”

(Kahlil Gibran’s letter August 14, 1912)

What I sensed for some time and was not able to formulate into a clear idea is that this phenomenon is not *Just* a psychological disorder on the part of the perpetrator. There is some essence that **differs GREATLY from the rest of us**. The narcissist in this recent life experience of mine deviates fantastically from other personages on whom the labeling trait of “narcissist” has been placed. As I look back , being a year and a half out of the ordeal in my marriage with the strangely unfeeling spouse, invalid mother-in-law, and overwhelmingly present bipolar adult stepson, I see that “unfeeling” is simply not the correct adjective or description of the encounter. It truly is foreign. It is psychopathic.

Let me share my thoughts on this.

There exists a more prescient awareness of the changing direction of our society and culture today with the introduction of writings on relationship narcissism from Lisa E. Scott's It's All About Him, Sandra Brown's How to Spot a Dangerous Man, and Sam Vaknin's Malignant Self Love. To include the emotional impact of such encounters and

resulting "dark night of the soul" for recipients of this psychological act, blog sites must be included such as that of Betty LaLuna and her Narc Raider on Facebook. Something insidious has altered life perspective across the world regarding a sense of detachment with no empathy.

Public social networking has brought a surprising focus to this imposing occurrence. Howard Bloom writes of change in comprehensive thinking and actions that lead to the survival of societies in his book, Global Brain, and these impressively thought provoking encounters in the literary field strive to calmly elucidate the developments precipitating from altered perspective of thinking patterns. Narcissism appears to be rapidly gaining the high ground within a growing number in our populations who simply fail to comprehend the well being of others, as if those being encountered unaffectedly cease to exist once the viewer's attention passes.

This takes the phenomenon of New Thinking's "living in the now" as expressed by Eckhart Tolle into a totally alien realm.

What may be a first stage in an altered path for society can be seen within the relationship abuses where one of the couple presents as a narcissist - not in narcissistic traits that we all possess, but in an adversely foreign approach to connecting with others. Thomas Sheridan, a bit off the beaten path as an author with his thoughts on reptilian brain programming within man, also writes clearly about this behavioral event in his book, Puzzling People.

Posters to amazingly numerous blog sites share experiences of striking similarity with personal results in horrific anguish for the relationship partner, changing her or his ability to cope with life and most definitely sinking these individuals into realms of dark confusion, following periods of chaos with the narcissist. Although some within the halls of therapy dismiss this state by

attributing the pain to the catch-all category of codependency, Scott refers to those easily used, devalued, and discarded as "sensitives." The "trek through the bowels of the twilight zone" reaches well beyond emotional devastation to include financially decimating the recipient of the narcissist's actions and expunging her sense of defined self to encompass even the loss of trust in basic belief systems.

Brainwashing develops through techniques of gas lighting, withholding communication, and sheer contradictions by removing the "victim" from the company of those with whom shared thought and emotions exist. The attempt to amend ideology works toward "social influence" by changing behavior, attitudes, and beliefs. The alarming note should sound with the apparent pandemic of this behavioral alteration which also presents in the corporate realm, workplace environment, and bullying in schools. Our culture is morphing in ways that redefine humanity.

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What sparks a surprised note of amazement is the commonality of the utter anguish described by the “victims” of a narcissistic relationship. These women AND men come from different life scenarios...different educational realms...and with different backgrounds. No simplistic patterns of abuse can be shown before the events with this perpetrator.

A psychologist checking my idea suggested I look at the type of person that would be attracted to a real narcissist. My first thought was that I was going to be pigeon-holed as a pathetic being. I had a not-so-grand encounter with my ex's therapist.

I disagree strongly with so many therapists who lump all into the easy category of codependency. For myself, I felt totally alone - left to wade through the muck by unaware therapists, family without knowledge, and friends who couldn't for their very souls evaluate WHY I didn't hang it up and call it a day...in my case, my track record was one of cutting the cord when things just failed to work into a reasonable facsimile of what I deemed a healthy relationship. And that may in itself prove a strong clue - I thought I had acquired enough wisdom, experience, and strong base of belief systems that I just might weather the negatives to pass into a thriving and long-term relationship.

Not all who find themselves in this predicament are needy and suffering the dregs of low self-esteem. Granted, I surely was *within* the ordeal. I think it is an open person of courage and integrity who might keep plugging away.

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in putting ones toes into the lake of relationships....the strings and connections find links beyond the partner, alone...I don't think it's a curse, at all. Connection forms society.

Integrity comes into play because we acknowledge the best in others...albeit going with the idea that this very "choice" of seeing PERCEIVED goodness will shuttle in it's coming to pass....is rather ludicrous, at best. However, it's a doctrine in our social beliefs. One I had felt valid.

I also put a lot of stock in my ex's therapist who told me I was helping him when he dumped his demanding invalid mother with Asperger's Syndrome into my daily routines. And when I attended a couple of joint sessions, with her guiding him, the two had such a great rapport that they talked over me (as if I weren't even there)...and about me in the third person. Now *THAT'S* something to look at a bit more closely. Was it some essence of ME that initiated this cavalier approach to my pain?

I'd like to share a funny remembrance. The therapist and my now ex-spouse laughed about my keeping a clean kitchen and washing dishes rather than letting them sit. If I had been asked, I would have responded that *THAT* was where I could have some sense of control in all the unending chaos and dramas that came with my spouse and his clan. The "family" dramas, trials, and tribulations flourished in their domain. No one genuinely wanted answers or resolutions. They seemed to seek a type of grand-standing in which others might evaluate them as "good" and worthy of sympathy.

New Thinking folks that I had respected and with whom I even shared a synchronicity of thoughts kept telling me that I "created" my life. So, by the proposition, "if a equals x and x is greater than b"....what was wrong with me? I used to believe and say that, too...now, I feel more that I do have choice, but a great deal exists in how one responds to some unfathomable situations that materialize from other fields and people involved.

Looking at Athens and Sparta, examples used in Howard Bloom's book, it was almost classically male/female....and the "female" side was consumed by the more aggressive Sparta - BUT the valuable traits of Athens in her culture and enlightenment survived. In my marriage, I wasn't to be absorbed, but actually erased after my purpose was served, leaving no trace or memory of me.

I have changed...there is an innocence that is missing...not a naïveté, but the almost too natural trust I had in others has drifted. I have also changed with the turmoil of a period of loss of faith. It was a dark place in which to find myself. Not "why has God forsaken me," but "IS there even a god?" "Is this just a PRISON planet?" The foundations of my belief systems were truly shaken....I think more from having my ideas of "goodness" turned against me. NOW! THAT could be real codependency.

I will share that the publisher I used could see and validate her authors who wrote of horrible ritualistic abuse (some dismissed because no evidence existed), but chastised me for showing myself to be "so passive." I think that is probably the crux. When one is willing to let something unfold with time and the idea is present that a better development can be found if enough patience and use of relationship building blocks can be mustered; this can be seen as (that funny phrase comes to mind) "too stupid to live." But, with me, hope truly did "spring eternal." My spouse and I were – apparently – such a fantastic match in the beginning...communication was in open sharing and our goals operated in tandem. Reason said we could find that common

ground, again. That is all part of the complicated staging process. To an outsider looking at this unfolding drama, there is no sense to be made of the charade.

Charade and masks find imminent importance for the acting of a narcissist. I'm not at all sure that most of the psychologically disordered aren't actually psychopaths. Labeling at the lower end of the spectrum gives a sense that this anguish-filled experience wasn't detrimental to the spirit and heart of the survivor. It was.

The definitive signs of psychopathy are an encompassing pattern of disregard for others, for the rights of others, and include a lack of empathy and remorse. There are false emotions involved and the ability to fit into social standards with manipulative tendencies. Grandiosity and deceptiveness play strongly. The disordered personality can be impulsive, irritable, prone to a lack of accountability and even aggression. There exists a predominant inability to perceive danger. The actor provides an amazing performance of acceptability in many cases and actually learns to adapt his style for his own needs. The victim may provide a meal ticket, funds, a place to live, sex, or standing in the social order. Once the needs have been filled, the victim or target is often devalued, denigrated, and discarded without a second backward glance.

These presences are very frequently described as “alien” because they do not operate with compassion. Our problem in society is that we are preconditioned to use kindness and responsibility and are slow to accept that the disordered person may actually behave without any guidelines that we might comprehend.

Chapter VIII

Soap Opera Revisited

“To explore what it would mean to live fully, sensually alive and passionately on purpose, I have to drop my preconceived ideas of who and what I am.” ~ Dawna Markova

During this period of my life when I evolved from being OK with me and seeking a romantic partner, to the time of working with the aftermath of life with a narcissist – after finding a not-so-Mr. Right, my youngest adult daughter used her humor to suggest a book title for follow up – (In Relationships when One says: On, no...it's not you, it's me...) Guess What? It Really IS YOU! I have to admit that tickles me. My life's trainings had been to accept responsibility for my own choices and to be accountable. This particular trek past purgatory and down through Hades genuinely sent me reeling. My ideas of constancy and focus of attention on the union, putting one step in front of the other proved part of some false prophecy or play in which I was the only involved character who had no clue about the director's aim. To this day I still feel blindsided by being so used, devalued, and discarded with not a backward glance from my narcissistic spouse and his clan. The key operating attitude existed within the entire group of his family unit. My oldest daughter, an appreciator of anthropology, believes that it can take long periods of time to effectively change the route of a society's thinking patterns. The culture media of developing individuals forces a shift in drives for survival and this affects each segment of the whole. However, there may also exist physiological hiccups within mental processes of the lone actor.

I can recall being so saddened by the stepfather's death and with the out-of-area sons and their wives arriving, along with my now “ex” and his girlfriend, it was as if I had never existed...times over the three years with the ailing parents were erased in the blink of an eye. My relatives hated what happened with this group of people and

with that, I had no way to grieve for the loss of the older man, whom I had come to love. It was an excellent reminder that life is in “the now.” My “now” was elsewhere. Grief for the stepfather and the memories of our times together and shared ideas and conversations would have to be totally my own. This proved a rough but beneficial healing mechanism for me. Whatever exists across the barrier of space and time...and death, I could now choose *my memories* and *the emotions attached to them*, after finally “seeing this tribe of takers” and recognizing that reality. I won't pretend it's not a process to let go of hurts.

The scenario pretty much existed that I had been “left for dead.” This would certainly have been a mighty bitter pill if it were all in the emotional realm, but it also hit my economic life, leaving me to start from ground zero with no funds. The most awful feeling was that I could no longer offer any really substantial aid to my children and their families as had been my intention. There would be no rescue and I am in the process of working through the devastation. I had envisioned something quite different for my 58th year of life. Here's the very basic truth for me. I had set my parameters of this life in my faith and positive thinking. The uplifting self-help ezines such as Peter Shepherd's “Cultivate Life” were a bit too lofty at this juncture. It wasn't that I didn't wish to reclaim my beliefs of old; it was that they did not fit my present suit of experience. Hubbard from Scientology would have surmised that I had dropped down-scale and would need to climb through emotional tones to rise toward happiness, productivity, and serenity. I knew and presently know there is much truth in many upbeat good works. Unfortunately, I felt as if I had been ousted from a college fraternity or sorority of the “beliefs realm.” Life and even reason had taken a shift, leaving me to grasp at hazy ideas.

Looking at articles from the magazine, Psychology Today, I admit to being perplexed by the changes within the standards of “correct thinking.” I can remember books and articles about doing the work one loves and having the money follow. Now, some of the lettered

elite Ph.D.'s cite sources stating that making money by doing what you love can decrease creativity. Continuity of beliefs has shown itself to be of major importance to my sense of stability and it seemed to be lacking wherever I turned.

I understand my late mom's thinking as being on shaky ground in her last days. She had weathered her own relationship upheavals and surprises and had remained strong, vital, and autonomous. My brother lived close to her and finally had to push her to rescind her driver's license. It was to her a sign of independence and she gave it up, fighting all the way. But, having mown down all her neighbor's hedges when backing out of her short driveway, there simply was no more leeway in sheer yardage to offer freedom for maneuvering. Perspective is both amazing *and* frightening, especially when a decision must be made.

Twenty-some years younger than mom when she passed, I can definitely relate to her feelings of dread in losing this signpost of liberty. And, of course, it was painful for my brother. Shortly after this milestone, mom's health began to deteriorate quite rapidly. My brother being a marvelous man, moved his wife and himself along with mom back from his house into her home to allow her the dignity to "call many of her own shots"...the final stages of her life were unwinding. Her ideas of independence and wishing never to pose a burden to her children faltered with the realities of physical needs. A relatively short period passed before mom finally said adieu.

My sense of self was shaken in my last marital excursion, just as discernibly as mom's in her coming to grips with a turn in her life's plans. I took my best ideas and dreams into the realm and at times became a raving lunatic. I really had won the lead in "The Taming of the Shrew" without the delightful ending. I look back over the drama's frame of three years to see a woman (me) overworked as a hired hand and construction aid, personal care attendant, chauffeur, maid, errand girl, mediator, bookkeeper and household manager to see myself within a troubled – or at least

Alternately-dubbed – marriage. There was little joy and an overflow of demands on me to produce for his entire family. I permitted such abuse. I thought I was part of the group and family and had made a commitment. There were oh-so embarrassing moments when I not only desperately longed for warmth from my spouse, but after layers of exhaustion had been reached with a man withholding intimate and sexual contact, playing reach and withdraw games with the silent treatment, I could not comprehend how our premarital decisions about openness and respect disappeared. Looking at myself from the outside, I really did appear absolutely crazy...or at the very least as a manipulative and pouting teen.

There were nights I followed him into the bedroom and I screamed, shrieked at him – trying to get a response. We had discussed so many ideas and concepts about marriage before the legal commitment. One of the greatest methodologies of “how to survive Arguments” was never to go to bed angry. Like so many other choices that I had felt we had agreed upon, this was of no importance to him. He often went to bed by 8:30 at night, just after dinner. There was

no alone time as a couple and with his adult son living with us, his comfort about intimacy was even less than before. Well, that was the reasoning. Just recently I watched an episode of “Everybody Loves Raymond” where the main character's shrew of a mom does much the same to her husband who is feeling dejected and ignores her, completely. It's not pretty, but desperation in trying to use old techniques to establish communication comes at such a cost. There is great humor in the sitcom, but it's awfully close to home.

So, the old ideas and philosophies have needed to undergo re-evaluation. This has absolutely nothing to do with one's feelings being hurt. All the re-creating of one's life deals with re-establishing the boundaries of self. Ultimately it isn't therapists, family, friends, or pets who give us purpose and meaning. We have to find that within ourselves. And when we – certainly I - so recklessly offer outlandish trial and error methods, I definitely had to rethink my chosen convictions. Who in the world was “doing the thinking” behind the me doing the thinking? Did my belief systems work for

me? Not in this arena. Before a brush with narcissism, these had been more than adequate, but now, I had seen something ugly in this activity of animate existence.

Therefore, thinking “It Really IS you!” has great appeal! In my personal sphere, all this transpired as I was undergoing menopause. Although the once rampaging hormones ceased to dance, I remember musing from time to time that I liked being a female. Can you hear the tune and lyrics from “The Flower Drum Song” musical, “I Enjoy Being a Girl”? I'd like to feel a bit of that zest again.

Chapter IX

My Own Reflection

“Belief in oneself is one of the most important bricks in building any successful venture.” ~ Lydia Child

Looking back, I was still strong enough to sense that I was responsible for my own survival...and it had to be now. Even through the early part of our separation, I thought there might be a return to our initial stage of marriage. However, looking back into that time, his mother's demands had yanked me right out of the starting gate. His family's needs to handle financial crises, host and pay for family functions, offer a safe haven for the adult bipolar step-son, and be available for personal care to both his parents – the invalid mother and her husband's chemotherapy regimen demanded attention and I was all so ready to step up to the plate. This was the life I had chosen and a commitment had been made.

Recognizing that I had been duped and now had to pick up the pieces, I put one foot in front of the other and mustered the tattered remnants of gumption to put my claim in his bankruptcy case together. I had no funds and could not locate an attorney who'd work with me without a hefty retainer. My thoughts were still dazed, and I could not and just would not believe that I had been exploited so startlingly and with absolute strategic precision. My emotional devastation was real and heartrending. Eat, work, sleep as best I could, and *remember to breathe*. I was still me. But I was dazed and sorely wounded. I couldn't even smile at the thought that I so looked like that sad and frightened deer, caught and catatonic within the glare of the vehicle's headlights. My movements were mechanical and the dreams and racing panic-filled thoughts tumbled in my mind. Never before had I been so unprepared, disorganized, and ill equipped to move forward.

That last Christmas together occurred because he cajoled me into his visiting and playing the role of stepfather and grandfather. He lived on his parents' property in our camper and came to my home sporadically. I had in my saner moments begun looking at financial avenues to allow me to sever ties. With the decision to remain available to his ailing parents during his bankruptcy, he had told his mom that he would spend time with me, his wife, much over her constant to-do lists and desiring him to be at their beck and call even on weekends. This constant offering of tidbits to satisfy me had me teetering in a state of indecision. By that December I was worn out and needed some space from all the family dramas and asked him to stay at his folks. He played quite the role of desiring to be a viable member of the family on my side of the state.

We shared a most unusually personal and sensual holiday season where he told me that was the way it should be between us. We renewed our shared love of Kahlil Gibran under the subdued romantic lights in the living room at night. My heart thought, ah....we are going to make it. Work and his parents kept him away until Easter where he arrived again to share a lovely holiday with my daughters and grandsons. He made plans for our upcoming anniversary and vacation. He seemed sad to leave. Within two weeks I received a voice-mail telling me that he was going forward with a divorce. During our years of marriage, that would be the card he played when attempting to have his way, usually involving money. That Easter he brought photos of land he wanted to buy “for us” – I was surprised because of the bankruptcy proceedings underway. Finally I underscored how unfeasible this path

would be: it dawned on me that he expected me to pay for it...he hadn't believed that all my funds had disappeared helping him and his family in their never ending black hole of crises and needs. By his departure, he accepted that my savings, retirement, and inheritance were gone.

It seems that he had rekindled a “great” love from the past and they had been planning for her to move her family into his mother's

home. To be fair to his next “love,” she had been told that he had been separated for years – and the charade was not unveiled by his clan. She had substantial wealth.

As pictures of his adventures with his new love and her children found their way to my facebook page, I finally accepted that I existed within that clan no longer. He was content to make no legal changes, but I pushed him to file for a divorce.

My personal funds or lack of those required that I file pro se and with a fee waiver. I contacted legal aid which could only make a couple of quick suggestions. The responses and my created “exhibits” of paperwork were intelligible and comprehensible...somehow. One year from that Christmas turning point found us both “unwed.” His work demands had decreased, his mother lived elsewhere, and his bipolar adult son lived out-of-state. He had a clean slate economically and could play the grand provider and head of a new household. What had my positive belief systems done for me in all of this?

They actually saved me from deep bitterness. As my recovery from the horrific four years trudged from day to day, I grew better able to cope with this change of direction. I wrote bits and pieces of articles which proved therapeutic as I deconstructed the past events. Choice. I always had choice. Naiveté. There was that, too. I had been a simpleton, so longing for the fairytale romance. More like Grimm's Fairy tales in their dark humor. I had been the Aunt Bea character to his Don Juan and was totally swept away by my ideas of fairy tales and positive thinking.

I am fast approaching my first anniversary of the divorce and snatches of pain, although dull, once in a while touch my awareness. But these are reflective...without attachment...and I'm me once again. I'm alive and I've survived. My tiny house is home to two amazingly independent cats and two delightfully loving dogs – all with unique and unmistakable personalities. Money still proves something of a struggle, but the personal anguish of it all has faded. I am grateful. I

find myself more often wrapped in an agreeable appreciation of kindness and the simple actions of daily life. The return of faith happened in the passing of days with quiet entry once more into the me that I felt had faded. This “she” is returning.

Chapter X

Background Connectedness

“Our life is a faint tracing on the surface of mystery, like the idle, curved tunnels of leaf miners on the surface of a leaf. We must somehow take a wider view, look at the whole landscape, really see it, and describe what's going on here. Then we can at least wail the right question into the swaddling band of darkness, or, if it comes to that, choir the proper praise.”

~Annie Dillard

My younger brother and I were always close in our youth. Time surviving the heartaches of life with violent alcoholic parents had forged quite a bond. Our parents joined AA in the last steps of our high school years and life improved, allowing us to return from foster care. When my father died, I was living with an aunt and uncle, attending college. My brother had his own memories with the differences of treatment in father/daughter and mother/son relationships. Comparing memories, we'd laugh at the disparities and how we would view these, from the outside, as if they came from two different families.

Our adult years found us raising families – I had more than one marriage and his of 31 years came to a wrenching halt when his wife met someone online and left him behind. There is much love, compassion, and camaraderie between us. His now ex-wife forced a rift between us that lasted almost a decade, but this chasm healed near mom's death.

So, comes the wonderful little phrase that we use – It is what it is...and what it is, is.

A very dearly beloved friend of my brother's had a quirky sense of humor. Personally, I thought he might be operating a few bricks shy of a full load, but his huge heart took up any slack. He used that

expression whenever developments in life happened beyond his scope of comprehension. Through the decades, my brother and I have turned to that delightfully funny phrase, too, in times where we couldn't get a handle on occurrences and any knowledge of where to begin to understand the driving focus on those situations. It was a shorthand way of consoling each other, knowing that we, too, didn't quite "get it." During our adult life, we have both shared a sense of familiarity with our thought processes and personal dealings with unknown territory. This, too, was the backdrop for my reasoning of dealing with my ex-spouse's clan. Bonds are forged from years of companionship and thinking blueprints.

But, having written this, something was surely amiss in the social setting in which my ex and I attempted a bizarre waltz of matrimony. My brother and his fiancé sent me a birthday gift of a terrific book by Dean Koontz and a gift card. Arriving earlier than my daughter's time for recognizing my special day, I opened the gifts and was delighted. I called to share my heartfelt thanks and then bought myself a small steak, little cake, and the animals some treats. Tonight, we celebrate! My brother and his lady are finding easier sailing in their new life together...my daughters are moving ahead with lives full of promise...and my grandsons make my heart sing with joy and purpose.

The book sent as a gift is Dean Koontz, SeizetheNight. In the tale of a man who suffers the inability to withstand direct sunlight, lives in the shadows and as a hermit. When his town struggles with kidnapped children, this adversity of his becomes a valuable asset to him in his quest to save the victims.

So it is in my life, perhaps not as dramatic in first showing. This strange adventure into the Dark Side – much like the TV show – seems also to have instilled in me new strength and the ability to evaluate without relinquishing hard won life skills of keeping one's own counsel and removing those whose presence serves as a "vexation," as described in the Desiderata. In this Now, life is genuinely warm, even with all the challenges.

So, just what have I learned in all this?

There is darkness...but just as surely, the contrast of remarkable goodness abounds...

Fear itself needs to be studied...it can hold a being hostage and remold life in inhospitable ways...

Focusing on more upbeat thoughts and ideas does make a difference...maybe not overnight...

Sometimes it's absolutely necessary to cut people, groups, and ideas from your life to enable this upward thought path to grow....

Ideas and dreams as well as discovery of one's realities are fragile...share wisely and learn to keep your own counsel...

Cherish the moments when there is a sublime sense of comfort and well being...and remember how these feel...

Be grateful for the best in this moment in time...it seems to multiply....

Know that we are each doing the best we can with the information available to us and our own state of ability...

We are individuals, but we are also part of greater societies...

We learn in spurts and this grand experimentation is simply and cleanly a tentative procedure of supposition...

We each don't have to be *right*...we must each be as ethical as we are capable of understanding values and motives relating to human conduct...and this will change as we develop...

We need to reach out for help and contact to avoid being stuck in any emotional position along this journey...

One step at a time...

The future is a canvas open to delightful possibilities....

“Life is like a coin. You can spend it any way you wish, but you only spend it once.”

~ Lillian Dickson

Chapter XI

Mulling

“Don't rely on someone else for your happiness and self worth.

Only you can be responsible for that...accept who you are – completely; the good and the bad – and make changes as you see fit – not because you think someone else wants you to be different.” ~ Stacey Charter

What happened to me after the fall of my own beliefs? I began my journey as a fairly bright, upbeat, and somewhat funny journeyer into life. My background consisted of many treks into a variety of religions, even to include Scientology. In my first writing, *Romance Stew*, I sought to find romance with all the trimmings. Dating and online encounters proved an amazing discovery – of self. I thought I had found “Mr. Right.” In a most unusual way, I did. I needed to know both the light and dark sides of this excursion and even of myself.

The resulting marriage and its drawing down the curtain on the last act of that particular play brought about *Life in the Aftermath of a Narcissist*. Such personal angst...and a glimmer of the redemption where one finally sees that there IS goodness - no matter how dark the tunnel before light is detected. I had held on for such a long stretch. My feeling was that I had paid my dues with eleven hour days working with and for the invalid mother-in-law, being given only two three-minute breaks and lunch. Now, there was a sore spot. My spouse had worked me and I exploded in anger after nights filled with tears, telling him that I demanded a lunch break.

He would be kinder and I would soften...the cycle seemed to exist in endless loops. Later, living as separated from my spouse, I suffered what I consider a serious crisis of faith. Stumbling on the writings of a doctor whose work on pharmaceutical medications and their overuse intrigued me, I also discovered this gentleman's unorthodox tenets that were his conviction of truth. They involved “End Times”

and the obliteration of the planet. This in a way became a turning point for me. I allowed it all. Granted, I had my own baggage and such a burning desire to make the marriage “fit.”

I had to stop seeking answers from outside myself. These views would not be mine. I was having a difficult enough time trying to understand my last few years and how I could have allowed myself into such a strange land. It occurred to me that I may have skipped some educational processes when coming to this lifetime because I surely felt ill prepared for this length of participation with a narcissist.

With the bright and yet differently attuned doctor, I seemed to be pulling bizarre lessons into my existence. It's possible to understand the idea of co-dependence from therapists. When trying to be “nice,” we can give too much ground. So, it was now time to rethink courtesy. I am no longer the same person today. This trudging through an alien domain has been enlightening but also, surreal and very painful. It's almost as though I were being forced to awaken from old ideas and tried and true methods. To be perfectly honest, I'm not altogether sure what these precipitates of knowledge acquired by instruction will mean to me in the days and months ahead.

I only know that there is no turning back in time. I am on my own route of development. However, the blogs I've found, texts that have opened to me, and people with whom I've linked have added dimensions that were not in my realm of thought on a daily basis. Dr. Scott Barry Kaufman who writes for *Psychology Today* is a most unusual presence with his educational spectrum in the field of psychology and his perceptions of intelligence, creativity, imagination, and personality. He is a cognitive scientist interested in the evolution of our culture. He and Dr. Darold Treffert, a psychiatrist who studies autism and many people who are “abled differently,” possess such amazingly expansive compassion.

My four years with a narcissist who loved me in an unconventional way, but dropped me on the whims of his tide of life gave me a different perspective of people. I felt much like one suffering from relationship Stockholm Syndrome. Saying that I, myself, was responsible for my choices became a criticism pointed at me. I already felt the fear of questioning my sanity and my ability to evaluate others. So many honestly meant well with their airy ideas of “just let it go.” “Let him and the life about which you had dreamed leave you.” The attraction has been, I am sure, the root for many therapists deciding the recipient of the narcissist's negativity to be co-dependence.

A bit like James' Marcher, I felt there was goodness in my spouse if I could but reach him. Maybe I had watched too many science fiction fantasies and read altogether too many romance novels. I ceased my attempts to turn the whole mess around and find the secret path to harmony. Little by little and with each passing day, I began to reclaim myself as Just Me. As the calendar pages dropped away, the anguish decreased. The sadness of loss of a lovely dream still hung over me. But I was finding myself again and the chaos that had been so prevalent in my life with my spouse and his clan began to settle.

I was not the same as the woman who ran excitedly into my husband's arms...ready to take my place as a member of a lifetime union. I pictured myself growing old with my man. We had covered so much territory...I didn't want to begin again.

And yet....that last Christmas together opened a new idea for me. If I am now so unhappy, why not be willing to find the wherewithal to start to build my finances and plan on going the way alone. Even knowing this was a good plan, I so hoped that life would surprise me...that our lives as a couple would turn around.

It quite simply was not to be. I no longer could offer refuge for him.

I had refused to give myself over to trust him completely and had refused to sell my tiny home. He was correct – I did not trust him. My small house was the last asset I possessed and I planned not to be homeless...and to one day pass something down to my children.

Chapter XII

Released Illusions

“ Every person, all evens of your life, are there because you have drawn them there. What you choose to do with them is up to you.”
~ Richard Bach

It was finally time to release all the lost illusions...the death of dreams of romance...the ideas of right and wrong and the strength of the bond between a man and woman in marriage. His mother was the dominant and focal point of his world. After all, she had done so much for her sons in their youth. Now, she needed care and nurturing....

I had fought his expenditures for his mom's extra desires...the money given to the sons to keep them afloat....the help in time, money, and physical plane presence to his first wife...I had issues to handle, too.

Looking back at that evening so long ago, in the beginning, where I was to meet his manager and coworkers, the work situation changed and the boss with his manager were unable to meet the small group of my spouse's co-workers as they toasted us at a local restaurant bar. He was unhappy at the change from being center stage. As all the folks were leaving, he turned to me and asked in his piqued expression, “you've got the bill, right?” And he left me there.

Soon after our marriage, we met my daughters with the grandsons at a campground about an hour from both our locations. My youngest grandson hurt his ankle and we soon discovered he had broken it when falling off the step to the camper. Rushing to an emergency room, he was given wonderful care and we took him with his mom to their apartment. Normally, I would have stayed the night with my loved ones, but my husband was silent and totally depressed. He mentioned thoughts of suicide and I was afraid to leave him alone at the campgrounds. He refused to communicate at all until the next morning where he said it brought back memories of his own son's

accident and how he hadn't responded as he immediately should have. This was but a sign of all to come in the months and years ahead. Nothing existed outside a connection to him and his core family unit of his mom, dad, two brothers, sons, and first wife. Nothing.

I was confused and frightened....but I carried on...thinking this was the life I had chosen and all that was required was time for change. I was naive.

In spite of all the upsets and loss of hopeful expectation, the heartbroken sense of failure marked my days. What was I to do with all the unrelenting angst of this predicament? I cried while taking my bath at night. Looking back over time to the first months of our marriage, I recalled asking my spouse if he married me for more than the money. He was flying high in his job and with his role of the grand provider to his folks and extended family.

He invited his son's three children to spend part of the summer with us. They lived with his son's ex-wife and they kept a long-distance relationship. On the trip to pick them up out-of-state, he let me know that I would be footing the bill. And he would have to work during the vacation. However, he felt sure I could use "quality time." I was stunned. I knew nothing of these children and their mother, the ex-wife to his son, had made no contact with me personally in handing over her young charges into my and our care.

I didn't understand the way this family operated. The kids were wonderful. Even so, the gnawing sense that I was simply a tool to be used haunted my conscious hours. I seemed to have become an ATM cash system and personal care attendant. I approached him with dark circles under my eyes – time as his mother's handmaid, his former sister-in-law's incessant boy-toy answering machine messages to him, the adult bipolar son who needed financial help and a chauffeur, the private and loving phone conversations with his ex-wife, the nurse down the road who dropped by on occasion to ask if he could come to use her hot tub...but, I was also welcome, the

statements that I had made promises and done things about which I had no memory, and his total lack of interest in sexual intimacy about which we had shared exuberance before the vows all took a toll on my sense of self and stability of my own beliefs. My question seemed always to be, “did you marry me for more than my funds and do you find anything about me that you like?”

How horribly sad and what a statement that makes about myself. Why didn't I leave? Below the surface reasons were that my house was now used by my daughter and I had “obligations” with his family members. But, the real reason was that I still felt somehow I should be able to turn it all around. I had come to believe him that somehow it was my fault.

Some of my family members urged me to leave, take my funds, and go home for awhile. BUT I felt as though this was my last chance for romance . We had crossed so many obstacles and we still moved forward. Surely there would be a moment where change could be grasped.

I never saw the final determination for divorce at his request coming. I was a ridiculously expectant personage in my wish for better times. I was unaware that I had outlived my usefulness and was to be set free. Somehow I simply had ignored all the signs, all the “notices” from him, and the style of me-first in which his family existed. The thought that I had earned my place for the long haul had comforted me as in our conversations where we knew a better future was coming. He did not wish to be dissuaded. It was much easier to start without all the baggage of upheaval – new conditions, new relationship, new life...a fresh start, except for his invalid mom, from the ground up.

Refusing all communication with me after his reconnection with a love from the past, I found myself in deep grief. I was lost in a sea of sadness and alone – more than I had ever felt possible. What had happened to the concept of working toward a tomorrow? He contacted me for something in that tunnel of grief to tell me that

“once the psychic connection was made, it would always be there.” That was like a fat new worm on the hook in my mouth. It gave me just a whiff of hope that my dream might be realized. The answers would have to come from within me. There would be no closure and no goodbyes. Time to write once again. Maybe seeing it in black and white might allow me to evaluate my own choices of the past...and now.

Chapter XIII

Passion's Melancholy Memory

“I am my heart’s undertaker. Daily I go and retrieve its tattered remains, place them delicately into its little coffin, and bury it in the depths of my memory, only to have to do it all again, tomorrow.”

~ Emilie Autumn

What I DID miss was the possibility of passion. Knowing that another man in my life was not the “magic bullet,” I began to find interest in other activities. In all honesty, this was a very slow procedure. Daily activities came and went. Time crawled by. One day I found that I simply hadn't thought about him, his family, the heartache, and the loss. And writing fell into its cathartic role. I was me, and there it lay out in the open...I had been left behind.

TheRighttoFallDown

Perhaps the greatest quest of this lifetime exists to be true to ourselves. Joining another in marriage should not precipitate giving away oneself and yet, compromise and respect for the values of the entity of the union must mesh with those of both individuals.

This state of having something in common with shared efforts and interests should entail a mutual "glue" and loyalty. The couple's association is to bolster both individuals as well as the life force of the marriage. Betrayal in one form or another is always a shock for one of the party's to discover. It might even be a surprise to the one committing offense that the bond was not so strong that such a change in choice might occur.

Dr. Roberta Temes and Geoffrey Gorer discuss three stages of grief for people left behind. Their model finds a base with the loss in the death of another, but it seems most applicable to the displaced spouse, as well. They posit that grief is not a disease and there is no magic pill for a cure, but it does have an end. "Numbness,

disorganization and reorganization are these stages and they bring about emotional, physical and behavioral changes in all of us."

The works of Temes and Gorer list numbness as the first stage - a place for the automatic pilot which also includes genuine sorrow, moments of anger, and even guilt. In disorganization, the next phase, a constant and acute loneliness accompanies the loss along with physical symptoms such as tightness in the throat, shortness of breath, and anxiety with panic. This second phase may be wrenching and we are advised to feel all the emotions and not keep them bottled. Eventually, the promise is that (1) we will complete the emotional process and (2) we will begin to focus our energy toward a future.

In the final stage of reorganization, the sadness and weeping subside and the one left behind begins to trust again in himself to provide a security on his own. Although the authors intended to assist in the experience of the death of a loved one, this message and sense of hope proves valuable to the spouse who found him/herself to be so easily discarded. The advice for obtaining a support system should be underscored.

Looking at life from the perspective of the disposable spouse, the self-esteem and trust in ability to fill certain roles finds a difficult path. Intimacies and openness of thoughts, joys, and upsets may have been turned inward trying to comprehend what actually transpired in the decision of the other partner to end the union. As one who was so quickly left behind, I found myself suffering anxiety over thoughts of "what if" and "were there unspoken boundaries and topics upon which I was not to communicate."

Betrayal is as personal as we are as individuals. Mine included a primary loyalty to parents, an ex-wife with her extended family, and the depletion of my funds brought into the marriage. Marriage counseling seemed a one-time interest for the departing spouse. My sadness and deep hurts came from the rites of passage over infatuations with other women, a lack of interest in me as a woman,

and the absence of meaningful communication. Having felt that I had "paid my dues" and was allowed to voice opposing ideas, I erred for the facade my spouse needed to perpetuate as well as his need to play the single entity.

In my own capturing of knowledge and practical wisdom, I can see that I was so enthralled by the vision of what life would be as the future moved into focus that I failed to fully evaluate the discrepancies of acceptability in the joint venture.

Ideas of honor and commitment must be shared. Expecting maturity in responsibilities may not be accessible if the partner finds that his role no longer serves the purpose for which it was created. Life often brings cycles and should one be unprepared for the bumps along the path, that proverbial "grass is greener" elsewhere mentality may be ever so enticing.

Is hope just beyond the next night-fall? Yes, but there is work on self and handling grief to be accomplished first. We will find that we don't look toward that departed spouse for aid or compassion...or answers and when that day arrives, it will be comforting that we can be fine just as a lone person. There will come a time when thoughts will not automatically drift toward the deceased union and the "what if's" of one's choices in behavior and response.

We have a right to fumble, err, and fall down. We also have the right to see that our best efforts could not manifest the joint vision without both giving to that manifestation. Helen Rowland summarizes the subject well in "A Guide" to Men": "When two people decide to get a divorce, it isn't a sign that they "don't understand" one another, but a sign that they have, at last, begun to."

God speed. Writing this while attempting to understand my place in the universe, I saw that the dream was only that and I simply didn't have enough common ground or agreement to make it take shape in the here and now. The man who had been my husband and the family I had thought appreciated me were only apparitions in a mist of my own making. They never took off their masks.

Armageddon Came Stealthily – a fairy tale...

“Freedom is the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.”

~George Orwell

Once upon a time in a land called Earth, a species known as hominid developed and populated the great globe. Surviving travail and cultural crises, the societies rumbled forward – many individuals and groups striving for the betterment of mankind. There did occur apparent deviations from global empathy, but the other sectors of mankind continued to right their vector momentum and crusade toward higher goals of mass survival and opportunity to thrive as both individuals and congregations. The criteria focused upon uplifted values and ethical perspectives for both mankind and the Earth.

As the citizenry grew, New Thought in the molding of ideas acted as a placebo in calming and guiding the more highly educated and industrialized beings. With the study of this domain of knowledge, presences could choose thought patterns and people with whom to associate. This path carried them away from the hubbub of troubles and daily engrossment in procuring the needs for base physical continuation and those of remedially soothing influences on emotional drives.

Preoccupied with attainment of beliefs and systems of convictions of truth, and with confidence in this habit of mind, the inhabitants with all the privileges of free men

became less aware of other activities in their realm. The great institutions of learning had categorized knowledge, functionality, reasoning, and had even established schools of remediation for aberrant intent of cogitation.

Within this finely tuned paradigm developed a tumor-like deviation of being whose thought processes did not house the ability to experience empathy. The vast scholarly institutions held that this was a psychological impulse of will, could be corrected, and went about the business of formulating treatments to reestablish balance for the individual, and thus, society as a whole.

Insurgency began to arise within small numbers of natives who disagreed with those within the great halls of understanding and their comprehension of truth. Straying from the hallmarks of data and using primitive observation, these rebels began to formulate a new idea - one divergent from the psychological treatment vectors. This new concept began to take shape as those within society reported horrific anguish from contact with a differing strain of hominid. In these encounters, individuals found themselves mesmerized, deprived of their original self-hood, callously used, devalued while following the best and highest forms of their belief systems, having their values and purposes shaken, and then unceremoniously "left for dead." Rarely could aid be found to salve the damaged psyches of the victims, for the true believers of the old psychology formats simply were unable to fit the data into their stable and well-acknowledged schools of belief.

Could it be that this unc customary encounter with a divergent strain of citizen could be more than a mutual tangency with an abnormally motivated being? What if an influential drive was not the root, but an intrinsic style of operation? How were the majority of presences to relate to this, and more to the point, how were they to protect themselves from emotional harm? These relationships proved unavoidably destructive to the well-being of individuals and filtered to society.

The insurgents pooled efforts, information, and unified contact to discover an amazing similarity with experiential reports. The strange behaviors of a group of beings whose common description could be a total absence of empathy began to form the base of understanding an event-horizon for any who remained in contact. The most honored notions of forgiveness could not hold stasis and a return to valued normality with this uncharted manner of conduct.

To remain viably humane and uphold the values of their domain, the primary citizens recognized that the exclusion of "the others" was not an option and yet, there might be no rehabilitation possible for this new strain of presence. They would need to define a new application of learning which might offer tools to formally acknowledge actions coupled with intuitive feelings of those coming in contact with the alien co-citizenry. In addition, techniques would be required to heal the damaged persons left in the wake of such predators.

The glorious past eras of golden virtues might have faded, but a fearless approach to handling the challenge of meshing two entirely foreign ideologies for joint survival on the globe called Earth would stand as a gateway. This ascension would bring change to the tried and true beliefs of the departed generations and perhaps a tarnished overview of life as that given by the prophets and teachers of great creeds. Today would prove an opening to a road of awareness. Knowledge, itself, is not power, but the ability to use that information and to do so with righteous intent would mark an evolving humanity as it strives to incorporate the incompatible into a new world. We, the insurgents are not the same.

And so, it begins.

Chapter XV

Full Circle, and yet...

“We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring Will
be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.” ~T.S. Eliot

So, poorer in the sense of financial existence, and carrying increased compassion along with the hope of improved emotional well being, I began this leg of the journey. I am genuinely pleased that I no longer fantasize about my ex-spouse being hit by an 18-wheeler. My humor is returning and life is so much more than Joseph Conrad's dark writings. In his novella, *The Heart of Darkness*, he explores the study of civilized man versus the native man. I will say that I find the idea of a fallible narrator to fit my ideas of this lifetime presently.

My time within the clan of my ex-spouse proved costly on many levels, but also taught me about the sense of loyalty in belonging. It takes courage to “let go” and honor to acknowledge one's own part in the drama that unfolded. I've come full circle from writing my book, [RomanceStew](#).

Once again with courage in hand.....I look newly at my passion for life....and fondly remember the gal I was...

Risk is everywhere, and so is adventure. One can voice hopes and dreams. The "stakes might be high" and we don't want to disappoint or be disappointed. We can also choose to be as romantic as we wish and be free with compassion, kindness, tenderness, and even hint at forthcoming passion, knowing the recipient doesn't need to be Mr. of Ms. Right.

Sometimes you just jump, and learn to fly on the way down.

The ability to take risks without expecting every encounter to work out is the most important ingredient for preparing any romantic stew. Positive values and outlooks, a "destiny path" and a set of goals form the basis for any lasting relationship. Self-help material abounds and I suspect their popularity is the ease with which they give us the illusion that we have already achieved those lofty goals ourselves, when in fact we are only vicariously experiencing the success of others. It has been my personal experience - and what better teacher can there be but the bruises and scratches from our own life's catwalk - that whatever our needs, whatever our desires - regardless of how much wisdom we've culled from others - ultimately, we have to do that work ourselves, our way! We also need to find a path of service that suits our own calling and connection to the God Source.

One cannot possibly expect another human being to fill every one of our needs or respond to all of our desires. Yet, Western culture focuses on individuality, and when we stop to think about it, we realize that our contemporary lifestyle, although rich with social interaction, is essentially a one-on-one type of existence. This means we almost set ourselves up for times when we feel lonely. Here's a reality check: It takes time to build a relationship. Perfect synchronicity of belief systems, backgrounds, etc., is both unrealistic and unavailable.

I wouldn't be human if I hadn't been emotionally bruised a few times and yet, I'll be the first to tell you these experiences have been a terrific education. I am grateful for each; they have not only taught me about what I didn't want in a romantic relationship; they also showed me how to be more discerning. And most of all: the failures did not stop me from trying again.

I'm the kind of person who needs commitment, especially when sex is involved. Lust is grand; those rampaging hormones are the best reminder we have about the power and beauty of the life force energy. But when you add that radiance that comes from "true love"

and appreciation, you have an unbeatable set of ingredients for a delicious Romantic Stew.

Ayn Rand suggests that love and sex in a relationship that includes intimacy, are our response to our highest values. Let the sex be the spices and herbs; let it be tenderizing ingredients. But the "meat, vegetables, and potatoes" of a love relationship should be a deep and lasting friendship that consists of trust, honor, respect, lots of laughter and shared experiences of growth. As in the song, "there's more to us than surgeons can remove." **Don't be afraid to turn up the volume.**

My approach to life will rejuvenate itself....

From The Hitchhikers' Guide to the Galaxy:

"The Book: Curiously the only thing that went through the mind of the bowl of petunias, as it fell, was, 'Oh no, not again.'

Many people have speculated that if we knew exactly *why* the bowl of petunias had thought that we would know a lot more about the nature of the universe than we do now. “

Resiliency, and thus it flows.....

After-thoughts

From Craig Huston of successtransformation.com, I received a fascinating video called, "Paper Airplane." It's a thought-provoking story about vision, courage and a sixth grader's unique response to a class project.

In class, a sixth grade teacher has created an assignment of working
with a

partner on paper aircraft to determine which style of design
would travel the farthest.

The class studied aerodynamics all week and then the day of
the race arrived.

The planes looked similar, but some did
better and some not as well.

Near the end, the one team had a partner who had not made a shaped
craft by folding the paper. His
friend's flew pretty well....if the partner could only make
his paper into one flying a similar length of distance, the
pair could win the race.

The partner brought his unfolded paper to the line for launch...AND
scrunched it INTO a BALL.

It sailed farther than anyone's plane.

Thinking outside the box!

**Just Perhaps that is the very gift we who have dealt with
a narcissist have been presented. We must look toward our
answers outside of the box.**

*A Hollywood Style THANK YOU with flourish and Tremendous
Gratitude to:*

*My fabulous daughters – Heather & Leigha, individuals with
courage and integrity*

*My amazing ambassadors of life and light, my spectacular
grandsons – Noah and Colin*

Sandra L. Brown

Lisa E. Scott

Betty LaLuna

Sam Vaknin

Robert O'Connor

Peter Shepherd

*All my Facebook comrades through the twists and turns of
Narcissistic Abuse*

and the soap opera's surprising cast of Characters

*To each and everyone of you... "even the enemy"....THANK
YOU!!!!*

"Bring On Tomorrow" ~ Barry Manilow

*Sleep baby, sleep lose
yesterday's blues
when you're ready for morning
have I got news..
our ship's in the harbor...
the street's turning gold
whatever you're dreaming, it's no longer on hold..
Dream baby, dream
while you were asleep
I had mountains to climb and a promise to keep
now home is the hunter and holding the prize
I'm waiting tell you when you open your eyes*

[Chorus]

*Bring on tomorrow for me and for you
we hung on through dark hours..dawn's overdue
bring on tomorrow and show me the sun
we'll live it together cause you are the one.*

*Smile baby, smile through
canyon's of night
but you'll really be smiling by morning's light
they told us we're crazy
they promised I'd lose
forgive and forget them...
they're yesterday's news..*

[Chorus]

*Bring on tomorrow for me and for you
we hung on through dark hours...dawn's overdue
bring on tomorrow and show me the sun
we'll live it together cause you're the one..*

*Without you it's nothing..
why else would I climb?
Together forever, hearts beating in time..*

*Oh...bring on tomorrow for me and for you... we
hung on through dark hours, dawn's overdue
bring on tomorrow and show me the sun..
we'll live it together cause you are the one*

The

Beginning

But with the “beginning” comes re-evaluation, remembrance, and a new awareness of a different specimen occupying our world with us. This may well not be linear, but it does appear to be an evolutionary development. Psychopaths are mounting in numbers.

Epilogue

Much to my delight, I have discovered a passion of my own. Unlike the narcissist who can experience only self, I pulled into a dwindling core of me as I hibernated in a dormant phase. Time eased the hurt and fear that I couldn't trust my own abilities. Loving my two daughters and my wonderful young grandsons, I have found a driving force in my interest with the Head Start Program. The ripples reach far across time and distance.

Head Start and its tremendous importance....

Whenever each of us hears that we might need to pay additional taxes, one can almost hear a collective sigh and groan ring out across town. It's astonishing and uplifting that we can bring those emotions into play because we care - and it's time we began to more vigorously and actively take an interest and involvement in our individual lives and those of our society. We need to feel an adrenaline rush for matters that make a difference. Sitting passively on the sidelines is not the hallmark of our American belief systems and most definitely not the style of Montanans - no matter from where each of us hails, to live here mandates a sense of survival and even purpose. Let's feel passionately, on whatever side of the discussion we find ourselves.

Calling the courthouse to learn just how great a burden this levy might be, I discovered that my property taxes will rise only two and a half (2 1/2) percent for my Goosetown house and that Northwestern Energy's funds should continue to aid us through this year and probably taper off following that. Having placed this on the table, I'd like to look at the benefits of Head Start. I'm a huge proponent of the mission purpose and the forward momentum of this program.

Our entire society has changed and the ability of '50's family methods of distinctive child rearing no longer remains extant. What's happened? Not only are indefinite numbers of parents unable to be

home with their young children, the act of developing intellectual and moral faculties falls outside the experience of so many. We have rising levels of narcissism, bullying in schools and the workplace, and the deterioration of our family structure.

Although the economic climate has digressed into recession and even depression, the majority of us maintain a hopeful expectation about our continuing lives and our nation's well being, albeit tempered with stark realism and tightening our belts. Ayn Rand's book, *Anthem*, deals with a culture which no longer utilized the word, "I." All that mattered became the interests of the aggregated group. We do, indeed, require an awareness of our community, but the individual drives, presence, skills, and enlightenment of each person move our people toward growth, development, and an expansion of just who we are and what we value.

The question of the Head Start goal isn't so much to answer what we want to do in this nation, but through choice, what kind of people do we want to be. No matter the environment of financial times, differing attitudes, or hierarchy of accomplishment, we want to be the very highest level of person in each situation with the skills we each possess. Within the performance of Head Start, there lies a system for achieving a sense of well being for our young people involved and the awareness of others, rights, privileges, boundaries, teamwork, and the bolstering of character. To make a difference as a unit of people, we are called to meet standards of conduct in living and to offer avenues for personal creativity, guidance, and freedom over time. This program no longer serves solely to level the playing field of a small segment of disadvantaged. We are becoming those disadvantaged with our economy shifts. Whatever one chooses as the base of belief systems, we must aggressively become accountable for the choices of today which mold the fabric of tomorrow. Only when there is health, optimism, safety, and education can a society not only survive, but thrive.

The Letter to the Editor regarding Head Start in Wednesday's paper suggested ways for cutting costs, including eliminating breakfast and snacks given by the program. This underlies the very core of the Head Start Program. Many of these children live in families who haven't the means for providing adequate nutritional needs due to finances or a lack of knowledge in this arena. The idea of forming transportation pools would be grand if not for insurance demands and safety mandates such as background checks and appropriate car seats with restraints. But, I applaud the "let's throw some ideas out there" approach. The Head Start program covers the scope of childhood development beyond a simple classroom setting.

What happens when a society finds itself in the throes of risk avoidance? I am speaking of evaluations of the reasonable and prudent man. If we do not seek to prepare ourselves for a more fulfilling future – in the advancement and care of our children – what will withdrawing into our present existence with boundaries do to us in the long run? The one common thread to advancement seems to be an underlying cause of growth. To pull back as in restraining one's use of credit cards is formidable, but worthwhile. However, to "tighten one's belt" only for the sake of keeping the status-quo is not in the best interest of a community that desires progressive development. Taking risks is part of the evolutionary process.

Passion for this life is Purpose.

**So many of us have found ourselves in
darkness....you have your own inimitable
light from within....**

YOU always did....

